

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



3 1761 01781128 2





Essays on the Novel



Essays on the Novel

*AS ILLUSTRATED BY SCOTT AND
MISS AUSTEN*

BY
ADOLPHUS ALFRED JACK
'''

London
MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
NEW YORK: THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1897

All rights reserved

RICHARD CLAY & SONS, LIMITED,
LONDON & BUNGAY.

PR
5341
J3

668084

19.11.57

ELECTRONIC VERSION
AVAILABLE

00001328

UTL-317A

TO
A. N. J.

Aestivi munera ruris.

PREFACE

IN a history of prose fiction which the author read many years ago, he remembers vividly a passage in which the advantages of a good title were extolled. For himself he is free to confess that he had difficulty in finding a title at once accurately setting forth the purport of the following pages, and of a printable length. The present work does not propose either to treat of the novel as a whole, or to furnish its readers with a minute critical account of Scott and Miss Austen. Every observer of the literature of the present day is aware that among the many tendencies to be seen at work in contemporary fiction, there is one especially noticeable, leading to the composition of tales in which the interest of the characters is frankly subordinated to that

of the action; and many an observer must have asked how far the practice of the older novelists supported this tendency, and how far it militated against it. In his private speculations on this topic the author was led to ask himself: what is the true sphere of the novel? and, specifically, what in a novel are the true spheres of character and action? The outcome is this book in which Scott and Miss Austen are reviewed with an eye to these questions.

The discussion is timeworn, yet it is hoped that the treatment, as much the result of accidental circumstances as of any purely philosophical intention, may have some of the attraction of novelty. Another critic might have preferred to speak more at large, and to have brought under contribution all literature from Rome to Boston, or at least the whole literature of the English novel from Richardson to Thackeray. But apart from the natural difficulties inseparable from a task of such magnitude, there were two good reasons against so ambitious a course. The critic who in his study

and with time at his disposal, speaks of everything, will not find many readers with sufficient learning or leisure to check his statements; and since the size of volumes and the patience of the public are equally limited, he who produces a hundred examples must be reduced from mere want of space to making many unsupported assertions. These circumstances taken together, the author inclined to speak only of a few books, and of those minutely. He believed that in the more familiar novels of Scott, and in Miss Austen's little masterpieces, he had ample material for his purpose. What he proposed to himself was, firstly, to write an introductory chapter, sketching very rapidly the history of the novel in England; secondly, to treat Scott as a novelist of character and action, with especial reference to six novels that are on every school-room shelf; and, thirdly, to deal with Miss Austen generally, to show how a writer who laid little stress on action, could attain success, and what manner of success she might attain. Besides this, it appeared proper

to state shortly, and by way of preface to a more detailed criticism, what was the general estimate of Scott on which that criticism was based.

This plan, with one exception, has been carried out. Any one who has ever written a book through which a thesis runs, knows how insistent its iteration is apt to appear, and how irresistible is the temptation to stray, to wander into alluring by-paths, and to discuss matters just seen from the high road. In these essays this temptation has not always been resisted. The reader perhaps may be disposed to quarrel with them because it has not been yielded to oftener for the purpose of supplying a more complete estimate of the writers discussed. There are already before the public a very considerable number of criticisms on both novelists; but the author would not take refuge in that, and he admits the danger that an essay on Scott in which only the most cursory reference is made to his humour may easily be misleading. He had, however, his reasons for the course he has adopted. To speak of that subject at length

did not lie in his way. With Miss Austen it was different: her wit entered into the discussion; without its aid her slight narratives would never have caught the general attention. Scott offers a large field for inquiry, and one may discuss how he has used action for its own sake, or for the elucidation of character without taking more than passing notice of his humorous figures. Indeed, it would have been difficult to have taken more notice of them without having lost all sight of the high road. A humorous character, unless he is as important as Falstaff, has singularly little to do; his is a speaking, not a walking part. Humour such as Scott and Shakespeare have is often but the overflow of the man, and one might write a treatise on Shakespeare's use of action without coming a whit nearer the explanation how he has made Shallow live.

The author, in conclusion, desires to acknowledge his obligations to those critics who, when he last appeared before them, spoke their minds with a candour which certainly ought to have had beneficial results. How far he has bene-

fited by the process it is fortunately not for him to judge, nor has he much hope that the present volume, which is openly concerned with a dogma built upon a number of subsidiary pronouncements, will escape the former charge of dogmatism. He pleads guilty to a doubt in his own mind whether, unless the critic of great authors is to become the curious painter of admiration marks, it is altogether possible for him not to dogmatize. Everything cannot be praised, nor can everything that cannot be praised be neglected, for there is nothing more likely to confuse our sense of proportion. The great authors are not comparable with the reigning sovereigns of the Middle Ages, who, it was part of loyalty to suppose, could not err. They leave their works as a kind of perpetual legacy, which it is any one's privilege to handle and assay. Unless we "touch and fear not" we shall hardly get from them that standard of excellence of which each generation stands so much in need, yet claims to have fitted to its altered requirements. Criticism, at its best, is little

more, and surely it is no less than an evaporating series of dogmas representing the frank mood of the time or the individual in regard to masterpieces. The style of Hazlitt, who has already lived beyond the period commonly set to critical life, is a fusillade of brilliant assertions. Mr. Arnold, who did more for criticism than any Englishman of his generation, is never more himself than when emphasizing a provoking dictum. It is true that Hazlitt's wealth of ideas disguises the fact that he is dogmatizing, and Mr. Arnold's charm is such that we forget he is contradicting dogma. When therefore one hears it objected to a critic that he is dogmatic, one must suppose it to be meant that he has not grace to hide his dogmatism. This is a fault, certainly, which he may obviate if he can, but it is not the fault with which he is charged.

CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
PREFACE	vii
INTRODUCTORY. THE NOVEL	I
I. SCOTT	33
II. SCOTT CONSIDERED AS A DELINEATOR OF CHARACTER	81
1. THE NOVEL OF CHARACTER. 'THE ANTI- QUARY'	90
2. THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF CHARACTER AND INCIDENT. 'OLD MORTALITY' ...	107
3. THE OBJECT OF THE PLOT. 'ROB ROY' ...	129
4. THE LIMITS OF THE NOVEL ARTISTICALLY CONSIDERED. 'THE HEART OF MID- LOTHIAN'	156
III. SCOTT CONSIDERED AS A DELINEATOR OF ACTION	184
1. THE PROSE STORY WITH A POETICAL EX- CELLENCE. 'THE BRIDE OF LAMMER- MOOR'	188
2. THE NOVEL AS THE INTERPRETER OF HISTORY, ITS AIMS AND RELATION TO THE NOVEL OF CHARACTER. 'IVANHOE' ...	206
IV. MISS AUSTEN. THE DOMESTIC NOVEL AND ITS POSSIBILITIES	232



ESSAYS ON THE NOVEL

INTRODUCTORY

THE NOVEL

NOW-A-DAYS, said Sir William Harcourt, every one is a Socialist. It is easy to form epigrams in this manner; all that is necessary being to select one of the numerous prevailing tendencies of the day, and to state the fact of its existence with sufficient emphasis. If it gives the politician comfort to repeat that every one is a socialist, the same kind of comfort is secured to the literary man by exclaiming that now-a-days every one is a novelist. The same kind of comfort is attained, as also the same degree of truth. If the socialist is a prominent element of our political life, the novelist in literature is equally conspicuous. Sir William Harcourt, when he coined his famous phrase, meant to silence the criticisms of those who were afraid

of the socialistic tendencies of the time, by assuring them that the vogue of socialism was no longer a coming event to be deplored, but a fact, however unpalatable, to be accepted, and there is no doubt that, to a large extent, with those whom he got to believe in him, he succeeded. In the field of practical politics criticism is silent before what is thought to be inevitable. It is the tendency of criticism everywhere, and if we can be induced to believe that a habit—whether that of the State regulation of property, or that of the composition of fictitious tales—is fixed, we care the less to inquire how that habit has been formed, or whether indeed, a still more essential question, it ought to have been formed at all. We have come to believe in the natural ascendancy of the novel, and as a consequence to accept the fact of its ascendancy, without inquiry or demur. As, however, a cursory acquaintance with the facts of the history of the novel in England will ensure the conviction that its modern ascendancy is rather accidental than natural, and as its position relative to the drama to-day is fraught with consequence to the future of letters, justification will not be wanting when the inquirer presents himself.

Now-a-days every one is a novelist: it is a heightened way of stating what criticism has of late years iterated, that all our present creative literary talent goes to the making of novels. The last of the great poets whose names have adorned this century alone remains with us; occasionally in the last decade or two there has been produced a chamber drama of excellence, but in this time all the reputations that have been made or increased are, almost without exception, those of novelists. The drama, as an active influence, is given over to the study of social difficulties, or to the close imitation of contemporary life; it is no longer open, since our modern laws and ethics are by no means beautiful things, but, on the contrary, plain and uninspiring, as a field for the display of the poetical imagination. Even our fancies lead us into the immediate presence of the practical and useful, an arid imaginative atmosphere in which poetry has died of inanition. The drama, with its gaze concentrated on temporary improvements, and drawn away from actions of abiding interest, no longer fulfils its highest function of dealing with life at large. Poetry, lacking sustenance, has lost its vitality. Meanwhile all the imagination, all

the artistic intelligence of the nation is devoted to the production of novels. The best work of recent years has been done in the novel, and in all probability there will be done in it the best work of the years immediately to come.

In this statement of the present position of affairs there will seem to some nothing surprising. Why should it not be so? they will ask, How should it be otherwise? The answer is, that it has generally not been so, that it has seldom not been otherwise. The present ascendancy of the novel, an ascendancy which I confess to thinking has not yet reached its height, is a development wholly modern, for so far is the novel from being the obviously best form for imaginative work, that nine-tenths of the great imaginative work of the world has been done in other forms.

Without entering on a question so open to dispute as that concerning the original virtue of mankind, it will be safe to premise that man in his origin is a truthful animal. Some degree of civilization, some touch of cultivation is necessary before the savage can rise to the conception of a lie: it is so much easier to tell the truth. So natural is it, indeed, that to state the thing

that is not, is even in modern societies a matter of some difficulty. If I see a man running, and I am asked shortly after whether I have seen any one hastening away, my instinct is to answer "Yes." If I answer "No," it can only be that I have some reason for not saying "Yes," perhaps a desire to shield a fugitive friend, or some disinclination to serve the inquirer. The members of an early society, therefore, will narrate what they have seen, and they will narrate only what they have seen: it does not occur to them to do anything else. In an early society a narrative of no consequence will almost certainly be truthful. Putting aside those, then, who in the exigencies of daily life feel the pressure of a difficult occasion, or to put it less euphemistically, find a lie occasionally convenient, the temptation to tamper with the truth will obtrude itself first upon those who deal with weighty affairs. The poet and the teller of sagas will be the first to feel it, since it is they who are the narrators of heroic actions. The poet who addresses himself to the task of narrating truthfully—and this is the task to which in early societies he does address himself—the heroic lives of the ancestors of his race or the myths, not myths to him, which detail the heroic

deeds of early gods, will soon encounter the difficulty that some of the actions of which he has heard are not heroic at all, or at least not sufficiently heroic for consistency with the rest. His temptation will be to exaggerate the less notable incidents, to heighten them, to bring them in line with the others; and this device, so characteristically poetical as to have obtained the name of poetic exaggeration, he, or his successors, will employ with increasing freedom till a large element of fiction has intruded itself within their work. The drama, a later development, and like the early sagas and epics, having its origin in historical or religious legends, will follow a similar course. At first the legend will be adhered to, but gradually more and more departed from, till at length the dramatic poet will deal without scruple with the avowedly fictitious. The saga and the drama will be the first to emancipate themselves from the despotism of fact.

It does not indeed follow of necessity that those efforts are in form poetical, there being nothing in the nature of a drama to compel its composition in verse, nor anything in that of the earliest traditional tales of a nation to prevent

their being occasionally written in prose. But though those efforts are not necessarily poetical in form, yet that they generally are so is but a consequence from the fact that their material is always poetical material. It is the kind of material that ought properly, and will certainly in time come to be narrated in verse. As a matter of fact, it may not always happen that the earliest compositions into which a large element of the fictitious enters are metrical, nevertheless they are either poetry or productions tending to become poetry; they are the children of the poetical imagination. Imagination then finds its natural outlet in following the course of poetry, and, in following the course of poetry, it proceeds to shape the material into accordance with its requirements, till there is finally evolved the imaginative drama.

Long before the modern imaginative drama was at its height, prose had been taking, more and more, the licence of fiction. The desire for stories had grown till the story-teller, finding his heroic legends exhausted, was driven to seek new subjects among the occurrences of familiar life, where the call upon fiction to supplement his material was more imperative. But though this

development cannot be neglected by the student who wishes to study in detail the history of the drama, it is still a late development: it is, so to speak, an unnatural development, a development of exhaustion. The imagination, first exercised on poetical subjects, following its natural development, will develop itself poetically, and so much is this so that when the novel first appears as a mature growth in modern Europe, in the tales of Boccaccio and his school, it is caught up at once, and its imaginative possibilities carried out by the poets and dramatists. On those tales, many of them only partly, but some of them wholly fictitious, the Elizabethan dramatists seized, and exercised their imagination upon them in much the same way as the classic poets did with the old legends of their particular countries. And though this is only an instance, it would be difficult to find any serious exception to the general rule that the imagination of all countries found not only its first, but its easiest development in poetry and the drama.

As one might have expected, the first efforts of English fictitious prose are to be found in the historical or legendary romance, that is to say, in England, long before any one thought of com-

posing a false and familiar tale, the imagination, when it was not at work with poetry or metrical composition, was at work with poetical material. Almost all these early English romances—the qualification is introduced to meet the exceptions which modern scholarship is so quick to furnish to every general statement—have a historical or legendary basis. The greatest of them, the ‘Morte d’Arthur,’ derived like most of the others from continental sources, is no exception to the rule. In a strict sense it is no more a fictitious tale than the ‘Iliad’ or the ‘Aeneid.’ It professes to tell the truth, but it does not profess to be bound by it. To the central incidents, already familiar to a multitude of people in Brittany and England, those responsible for its production do not confine themselves. On the contrary, we are furnished with the sayings of the characters, matter of necessity purely imaginary, and also with a number of trivial details which the spoken word could not preserve. To the ‘Morte d’Arthur’ the term novel is totally inapplicable; the ‘Morte d’Arthur’ is no more a novel than the ‘Odyssey’ is a novel; it is a prose epic, indulging, perhaps from its being written in prose, perhaps from the idiosyncrasy of the

peoples among whom it took form, rather more freely in what was known to be fictitious detail than was common with classical epic poetry.

‘Euphues,’ the next outstanding work in the history of English prose fiction, is a composition of another kind, and for the explanation of its appearance attention must be directed to other influences, to those excited by Boccaccio’s tales and the ‘Gesta Romanorum.’ With the gist of some of the former, Chaucer, before the publication of Malory’s book, had already made English readers familiar. About fifty years after its publication, many of them were translated directly by Painter and others. To the influence of the latter ‘Euphues’ perhaps owes as much, owes as much at least as regards the habit of mind which was responsible for its production. The monks in their sermons having to provide, as all moralists have had to provide, against dulness, struck upon the notion of speaking in entertaining and contemporary parables to which an explanation was appended. In the ‘Gesta Romanorum,’ a collection of these monkish sermons, this idea of inventing a number of idle tales “for our doctryne,” as they would have expressed it, took literary form.

As a result, though the entertainment of the story was often more obvious than its application, and invariably of far greater length, the fancy of the Middle Ages was caught. In the interests, or in what by each successive generation have been thought to be the interests of morality, much has been pardoned, and many strange courses adopted, and in the interests of morality the first English novel was written. It says, however, a great deal for the original strangeness of this particular medium in which imagination was to exercise itself so freely, that long after the licence of artistic invention had been granted to the poet, it was still unclaimed by the writer in sober prose. So much was this so that it is doubtful if even Lyly, the first English novelist, would have thought of writing a story for the mere sake of telling it. In 'Euphues' the sole use of the adventure was to ensure the perusal of the treatise; its first aim was didactic. 'Euphues, the Anatomy of Wit,' published in 1579, has the distinction of being the first of a long series of productions of which it was in no sense intended to be one: Lyly wrote the first English novel without intending to write a novel: the first English

novel appears as the fringe of an educational treatise.

Sir Philip Sidney's 'Arcadia,' on the other hand, has no didactic intention; in it the fictitious story or rather series of stories seeks no other justification than that afforded by the interest of the events. There were two reasons for this difference. In the first place many of the incidents in the 'Arcadia' are those of the older legends, and in England, for the refurbishing of old legends there needed, by this time, no excuse. It had become a customary, as it was in some sort a poetical thing, to relate with a certain amount of freedom these half historical and essentially poetical tales. In the second place Sidney as a prose writer considered himself entitled to the licence of a poet. "Like almost all of his contemporaries," says Mr. Raleigh in his interesting work on the English novel, "Sidney defined poetry so as to include any literary work of the imagination, and absolutely refused to make of rhyming or versing an essential;" and again, "the characteristics of Sidney's style are in a large measure attributable to his conception of the 'Arcadia' as a 'prose poem.'" And so, it may be added,

are the general characteristics of the work. It seemed almost as natural for Sidney in his prose poem to give the rein to his imagination, as for a poet to write poetry on an imaginative subject. Poetry, then, which had long enjoyed the licence of fiction, presided at the birth of the second considerable English novel, just as morality which had long derived support from fiction presided at the birth of the first.

No doubt, if one were to use terms with absolute precision the name novel might be denied to both; a novel, as we understand the term now, being a fictitious story dealing with familiar events,—events, that is, taking place in an ordinary and not in a legendary or mythical world, and dealing with them with no other than an artistic object. Lyly's tale had another object, while Sidney's tale, far from dealing wholly with familiar, dealt in some part with legendary, and in great part with chivalric events. But whether we grant the name or withhold it, for our present purpose it is sufficient that in 'Euphues' and the 'Arcadiâ,' we have two stories, avowedly fictitious, dealing with familiar events, and written in prose, and that Greene, Nash and Lodge, all contemporaries

of Sidney, all produced short compositions, certain of which fulfil every requirement of the novel. Of these writers, Lodge was the only one who, as far as is known, consistently wrote stories without any ulterior purpose, though even he is suspected of an occasional autobiographical intention. Greene dipped into autobiography, and more than dipped into didactics. Nash wrote only one novel, the rest of his imaginary and familiar scenes occurring in controversial pamphlets. Nevertheless the novel had arrived. One can say no more indeed ; it had come with difficulty, and it had not come to stay. The novel had arrived ; but the drama, affording a more natural field for the exercise of the imagination, was just at its zenith, and to the construction of dramas, during the remainder of Elizabeth's, and the whole of James's reign, the imagination of the country went.

With the gradual decline of the drama the novel reappeared, and this time again as an importation from abroad. The form in which it returned was not auspicious. In France it had become the custom to select some character or characters of classic times, and to build

around them a huge series of imaginary adventures. The custom was copied in England, and thus we find the English fictitious tale, half-a-century after its comparatively mature development in the hands of Nash, again in close connection with fact. In the whole curious history of the English novel, there is nothing more curious than this doubling back on its course. The novelists of this new movement are found inventing legends to tack on to a historical character, making, as it were, a kind of fictitious history, just as the old writers were found inventing characters to fill out a legend. The novelist had been laboriously evolved from the imaginative narrator of real legends, only to become the narrator of legends purely imaginary. The public had been told what were in the main believed to be the facts about characters whom many deemed mythical; the business to which the seventeenth century romancists applied themselves was that of telling what no one believed or was expected to believe about characters known to be historical. In a word, the old legends were exhausted, and these romancists of a later day imagined new. In a scheme of this sort, it is

easy to see, there was no lasting vitality. The immense multitude of these romances produced would by itself convince us that in their time they enjoyed a considerable reputation, but with their time their reputation ended, and they died, as the heralds say of childless men, *sine prole*. At the moment of their decease there was nothing ready to take their place, and the novel, defeated in its attempt to show that an imaginative tale is best told in interminable prose, fell back into temporary obscurity. Our modern novel took its rise not in the desire to tell a story, but in the desire to draw a character.

“The works of the lesser writers of the seventeenth century,” says Mr. Raleigh, “show the rise of a new spirit, foreign to the times of Shakespeare,—a spirit of observation, of attention to detail, of stress laid upon matter of fact, of bold analysis of feeling, and free argument upon institutions; the microscope of the men of the Restoration, as it were, laying bare the details of daily objects, and superseding the telescope of the Elizabethans that brought the heavens nearer earth. No one word will finally describe it; in its relation to knowledge it is the spirit of science, to literature it is the spirit

of criticism." The prose of the latter part of the seventeenth century directed itself to the study of subjects with which prose is peculiarly competent to deal: it gave itself to the work of observation and criticism. As the offspring of this tendency there sprung from the press a number of "characters," short essays on the characteristics of types, some diaries enlisting the interest of the public in matters of familiar concern, and a whole literature of essays in which every corner of the social state was brought under review. A minute study of man, and his habits of thought and conduct, became the real business of letters. To bring vividly before his fellows the movements of a mind subjected to religious impressions, Bunyan wrote his famous story of 'The Pilgrim's Progress.' To illustrate the characteristics of a genuine English squire Addison wrote various chapters of a disconnected novel on the life of Sir Roger de Coverley. Questions the most diverse concerning human nature and government, came to be asked, and answers to them were attempted in a series of hypothetical cases. There is a correspondence too interesting to escape notice, between these first considerable

efforts of the English novel, and the serious essays on the relations of the sexes, and the proper position of woman, which to-day take the form of fiction ; nor must the abuse which honesty often provokes, induce the critic to forget that what the more earnest of a growing school are doing, is just that which was done so successfully at the beginning of last century. How would man comport himself in solitude ? asked Defoe,—for the fact of Alexander Selkirk's imprisonment had by itself no absorbing artistic interest,—and immediately there came from his pen a novel, and not, as would have happened fifty years before, a speculative discussion. What is man like ? asked Swift, and his answer is to be found in 'Gulliver's Travels.' In all these cases there is a story, but to get the attitude of the time we must remember that it is not there for itself. Matters are similar with Richardson ; his incident is subsidiary to his main purpose, and though his novels have a narrative, they are studies of character. "If you were to read Richardson for the story," said Johnson, and the remark is as true as it is famous, "your impatience would be so much fretted that you would hang yourself. But you must read

him for the sentiment, and consider the story only as giving occasion for the sentiment,"—testimony, and contemporary testimony too, that the first great English novelist was in touch with the influences which brought the English novel about. Nor were his great and immediate successors, though far more attentive to the interest of the narrative, in the habit of treating it as of paramount importance. With these writers—and Fielding, despite Coleridge's puzzling remark that the plot of 'Tom Jones' is one of the three best in the world, does not seem to be an exception—we have to consider the story but as a series of incidents giving opportunity to the characters. The story of 'Tom Jones' itself, which cannot be denied to be admirably suited for its purpose, is little else, and if Coleridge meant what it is just possible he did mean, that the plot of 'Tom Jones' was as admirably adapted to the requirements of the novel as those of 'The Oedipus Tyrannus' and 'The Alchemist' to the requirements of the drama, there will be few to disagree. The novel, it cannot be too plainly stated, in the hands of Richardson, Fielding, Sterne, Smollett and Goldsmith, was a patient study of familiar character

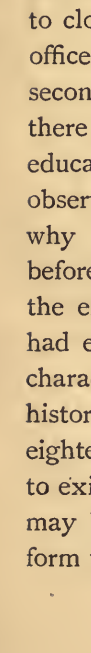
and emotion. In their hands the novel, for the first time in England, was seriously set to do work which was not distinctively poetical, work too minute and too unimagined for poetry to do. It was not long, however, before the novel again betook itself to imaginative subjects, and again attempted to secure attention for the interest of the story alone. Horace Walpole, Mrs. Radcliffe, M. G. Lewis, and even Godwin—when we leave ‘Caleb Williams’ with its political intention out of account,—all wrote tales depending for their effect upon the imaginative nature of the incidents. The interest excited by the persons introduced was strictly secondary. As far as characters were drawn, they were drawn, not with the loving detail of Fielding or Goldsmith, but only in their general aspect.

To both these schools, the school of character distinguished by many famous names, and the school of incident with its long, and, up to Scott’s day, comparatively inglorious record, the Waverley novels owe something. On the one hand, as in ‘The Antiquary,’ we have studies of character pure and simple, on the other imaginative stories like ‘The Bride of Lammermoor,’ while between them there is a long series of

tales like 'Old Mortality,' which, though depending for part of their interest on dramatic incidents, contain studies of character as careful as anything to be found where the interest of the narrative is purely subordinate. In contradistinction to Scott, Miss Austen pays allegiance entirely to the school of character. Working in a smaller field than any of her great predecessors, she is also far more indifferent than any of them, to the rule which prescribes that before individuals will display the deeper side of their natures they must be cast among large events. To come to later times, with Thackeray and Dickens and George Eliot, the novel is mainly a study of character; with our actual contemporaries too often a fictitious tale. It is a history full of interest. Prose fiction on its first appearance in England was occupied, when differences of temper and circumstances are taken into consideration, in doing much the same work, which in a minor, if also in a whole-hearted way it is doing at the present time. No modern novelist would venture into a world of dragons, knights, and shepherdesses, or even into one of magic mirrors, halls of Eblis, and enchanted casques. That world for all prose

purposes is altogether dead. But strangely enough the modern counterpart of it, a world of adventurers and heightened adventures, is found much more easily than the modern counterpart of the world of Richardson and Fielding. The collocation of ideas may seem grotesque, but 'Treasure Island,' the parent of a lively progeny, may fairly be taken as our modern equivalent for the old prose tales of chivalry and romance. Probably, in this exaggerated form, of purely temporary duration, the development is still surprising. It took the novel, as a medium in which an imaginative story might be told, nearly two hundred years to gain a footing in England. The novel of character, if we except its easily explainable failure in the Elizabethan period, had only to appear to be accepted. Was it an accident that it so fell out, or are these historical facts a testimony to the genius of the novel which novelists cannot safely neglect? To attempt an explanation of them is to attempt an answer to the question.

The success of the novel of character is the more easily explained. In the first place, it must be apparent that there are certain things



INTRODUCTORY

which poetry cannot do, or can do only in a lame and perfunctory manner. Poetry is at a disadvantage when any realistic effort is attempted, the poetical imagination, whether using the form of verse or the form of prose, being just that faculty by which we rise above the details of ordinary life. Poetry, with the swift methods incidental to the art, is little fitted to analyze the petty variations of ordinary character, and if life in all its aspects is to be submitted to close observation and intricate criticism, the office must be performed by prose. In the second place, when Richardson began to write, there was a widespread desire among the educated class to submit life to this process of observation and criticism. The only reason why the novel of character did not succeed before the eighteenth century, was that before the eighteenth century no such general desire had existed. The true reason why the novel of character has had so long and so successful a history in modern times is, that since the eighteenth century such a desire has continued to exist. The success of the novel of character may be explained at once by saying that the form was better suited than any other for doing

the work to which it was set. Slowly as the taste for prose fiction has arisen, the taste must remain as long as there is a desire for a kind of work which nothing but prose fiction can perform. It is not a poetical work, and therefore prose is necessary; the interest of the reader must be sustained for a considerable period in imaginary events, without the proper manipulation of which character cannot be properly displayed, and therefore some kind of story is essential.

To explain the failure of the novel of incident is more troublesome. But to turn first to the facts—the history of the novel of incident shows conclusively, what indeed may be shown in other ways, that poetry is the most natural medium for imaginative work, that the imagination first exercises itself in poetry or on poetical material. And as a kind of corollary to this, the history of the novel of incident shows conclusively that it was a work of immense difficulty to accustom the public to an essentially prose narrative of imaginary events. Few, for instance, would have thought of asking Chaucer why he told stories in verse; almost every one would have been a little surprised had the educational object

of Lyly's 'Euphues' not been apparent on its face. It seemed natural for the poet to imagine occurrences, it did not seem natural for events to be imagined in sober prose; it did not seem natural, nor was there any sufficient reason why a departure should be made from the ordinary course. Had the novel of character not taken root in England, it is doubtful whether the novel of incident would ever have been thought to have justified its existence. Several times it had attempted to gain a position on its own merits, and several times it had failed; its opportunity came, by a curious turn of literary history, when the novel of character had established itself, and its success such as it is followed in the train of the substantial successes achieved by its rival. It was perhaps natural that it should. A novel of character exists for the delineation of the niceties of character and emotion, but since it is a novel it must contain incident, and it will happen occasionally that undue emphasis is laid upon the action. Habituated to these tales in prose, and forgetting their original purpose, the reader will come to take delight in the story itself, and from the mere force of habit to accept unquestioningly

the form in which it is cast. The novel of character, having a totally different intention from the drama, and doing a totally different work, drew, at least during the days of its preponderating popularity, men's interest away from dramatic events. And when interest in regard to them reasserted itself, the novel of character, changing with the tendency, was replaced by a transition the most natural by the novel of incident. The drama in modern times has consequently what it never had before, a competitor in the field. The novel of incident, trading upon the taste formed by the novel of character, satisfies also that other taste which without it would have had to depend upon poetical satisfaction. It is sufficiently remarkable that it should do this, since the novel of incident, judged by itself, is little more than the drama grown garrulous. Had it needed to win acceptance on its own merits, it could never have hoped to compete with it. It is true of course that it is only in its nobler form, in 'The Bride of Lammermoor' for instance, that the novel of incident can be so spoken of. In its more familiar form there is nothing more unlike the drama. There the only reasonable comparison,

when it does happen to appeal to the poetical emotions, is either with the Idyll, or with poems in ballad form. But there also, when it makes no kind of appeal to the poetical emotions, but confines itself to the narration of petty and prosaic details, it is, as its admirers point out with truth, a department of literary activity entirely modern and singular. This indeed is but another way of saying that for her long neglect of the novel of incident, history has more than a show of justification, since in its greater forms the novel of incident has encroached upon the province of poetry, and it is only in its less important that it has done work peculiar to itself.

The case of most interest is that in which the novel of incident joins issue with the drama, and for the purpose of glancing at that, it will be sufficient to take the instance already given, in all probability the one which would be selected by those who wished to establish the claims of the novel of incident as a separate literary form. 'The Bride of Lammermoor,' of all Scott's contributions to imaginative literature perhaps the greatest, has a host of excellences and scarcely a fault: the incidents are few, and extremely

striking ; the dialogue is often not only of poetical merit, but of the highest poetical merit ; in the serious parts of the tale there is hardly a word wasted. But these excellences, it is important to notice, are the peculiar excellences of the drama—a great action, a serious and poetical dialogue, a total absence of verbiage,—and admirably as Scott tells his tale, it is impossible not constantly to feel that something is amiss. The speeches of the Master of Ravenswood, for example, come oddly in the midst of a narrative. They are so far removed from real life, so much the product of a heated brain, that, to lend them a full belief, we need to have brought before us, by the short clear methods of the drama, the actual scene which provoked them : in such cases nothing should come between the reader and the imaginary figures. Who would lend credit to the dialogue between Iago and Othello had Shakespeare furnished it with a running commentary in prose : who would not lose the illusion : who would not feel the discrepancy between the placid narrator and the creatures of his fancy ? This is the danger which the prose narrator of such matters has to face. The dramatist, not having to narrate, escapes it, while

the narrative poet avoids the difficulty by rising with his narrative, and though it is true that Scott in 'The Bride of Lammermoor' is continually and successfully doing what the poet does as a matter of course, it is done with effort. A prose narrative, however often it may attain to poetical excellence, can never have poetical excellence in the same degree as a poetical narrative, much less can a prose narrative, however often it may attain to dramatic excellence, possess the dramatic excellences of the drama. The great qualities of 'The Bride of Lammermoor,' it is difficult for any reader not to feel it, would have been still more evident had the story been told in dramatic form, while such faults as it has, an occasional excess of description, and the undue importance, detrimental to the tragic effect, which Scott has given to the character of Caleb, a dramatist would not have been tempted to commit. And if it is true that 'The Bride of Lammermoor' would have gained by being cast in dramatic form, it is evidently true of all of its successors, where the authors have not found it possible to overcome in the same degree the difficulties incidental to their task, where the narrative form has tempted them into prolixity,

and prevented them from attaining, as Scott has attained, success.

But the excellence of the drama is not merely this, that it is the best medium for noble imaginative work, but also that it is a medium extremely ill-suited for the treatment of ignoble affairs. The drama, delighting in swift methods and great actions, does not readily suffer the interminable detail with which the realistic novel has made us familiar. The drama, when it becomes a drama of every-day incident—and how many of our modern dramas are no more—is seen to labour in its course. And though this want of adaptability on the part of the drama is just that which the partisans of the novel, an infinitely more flexible form, emphasize as its radical defect, I prefer to think of this, its distinguishing characteristic, as a real and salutary merit. The work which is peculiar to the novel of incident, and which it is able to do, as is proclaimed by those who are in touch with modern novels and modern dramas, far better than the drama, is work, of which in a modern society it is easy to have too much. In a modern society, the danger is not that our interest will be carried away from the affairs of

daily life, but that, on the contrary, we shall cease to take interest in anything else, that our imaginations will become stagnant, and that ultimately we shall lose ourselves in idle wonder at the variety of the commonplace. And in the face of this tendency, it would perhaps not be unreasonable to hope that on the literature of the present day the novel of incident will come to exercise a decreasing influence, since in its virtual absence the imagination, dealing with events rather for their own sake than for the elucidation of character, would have to resort to poetry, while the drama, freed from the competition of the novel of incident, would turn to the work that was most natural to it. The novel, doubtless, would remain with us, but it would remain with an altered intention. However wide its range, it would have for its primary object the study of character; however wide its range—and its range would of necessity be wide—we should get rid, at a stroke, of a whole literature, that intolerable array of volumes in which event is crowded upon event without dignity or purpose. Whatever was peculiar to the novel of incident, its series of artfully concocted improbabilities, its appeal to a jaded

fancy, its truthfulness where truth is trivial, would disappear, while whatever was excellent would be caught up and retained, that part, where the events, though familiar, were useful as machinery for developing character, by the more serious novel which would take its place, and that part where the events were important, by a drama which directed its gaze to subjects of poetical weight. The taste which the increasing production of these "light tales" has encouraged would die with them. The novel of incident took so long to come into being that it would not without difficulty be revived, and in this happy future, we should ask only of a character if it was interesting, and of an action if it was great.

CHAPTER I

SCOTT

IN this age of biography, when no sooner is a man of any eminence dead, than his family, his relatives, or his friends clamour for the story of his life, it is common to hear biographers complaining of the dearth of material. Of those complaints, the loudest and most just come from the biographers of literary men. In most instances their self-imposed task is a hard one. Every year, from different points of the compass, a certain number of youths go to London, and, once arrived there, spend existences of average duration in writing, as the case may be, a small or a great number of books. About the lives of such people there is a sameness which it is impossible for the biographer to get over. In the life of the ordinary literary man, there are, speaking generally, no events,

no excitements greater than those produced by the reviews of meritorious books, and no periods of great enthusiasm. The ordinary literary man not only lives the ordinary life of the educated classes, but his whole being is in touch with them. He is one of a hundred thousand or two who share his feelings, and, from the accident that he spends his time in writing better than his neighbours, one of a thousand similarly occupied.

With the great authors there is this difference, that though the path laid down for them is, in most cases, that of the ordinary literary man, they are so distinguished from their fellows, they have so much of the fire that quickens, so eager an interest in what passes through the mind, that it seldom happens that their life is ordinary. Let the circumstances in which they are placed be as colourless as they may, something of their own vitality will somewhere give it colour. Even if the life is such as Wordsworth's, that of the typical student or recluse, the greater energy of the man will prevent it from becoming merely typical, it will stand out from among similar lives with a certain force of its own. And just as wherever there is force and the

motion generated by it, wherever there is really life, there is variety, so about the lives of the great authors, however similar their circumstances, there is no sameness. Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, to mention only a few, and those contemporaries of Scott, were all men who spent their time in writing, yet how different are the records of their days! So distinct were their characters that even in the limited possibilities of the literary career, the individuality of each appears plainly, and it is this that gives its fascination to literary biography, a perpetual sameness of subject and a perpetual difference of result.

The lives of the great authors all have interest; it does not always happen that they also contain instruction. The force that makes whatever they do remarkable drives them often into excess; if not always an excess to be avoided, at least one which cannot be imitated, and if not useful as a warning certainly useless as an example. If we wish to read for the purpose of intelligent imitation, it is to 'Plutarch's Lives' that we turn. Plutarch's soldiers and captains were not men of imagination: what they saw, other men see though not so clearly, and what

they did other men are continually doing on a scale reduced. Those robust masters of an active world astonish us not as the Laputans astonished Gulliver, but as Gulliver astonished Lilliput. The poet, the novelist, he who plays with ideas is built of other stuff; he is distinguished from us by his difference as well as by his greatness, and his life is far less likely to serve for a model. Nevertheless, there have been such lives; the life of Wordsworth was such—and such, in all essentials, was the life of Scott. Of the two, Wordsworth's was the more blameless, the more free from conventionality, and the more in consonance with a rigid individual ideal. However, it was less human, and had less of dramatic interest. Scott's very weaknesses—with one exception, his punctilious severity in regard to any departure from the code of chivalric honour—all amiable, serve but to endear him to us, and his life, in which great prosperity was followed by great misfortune, has of necessity more attraction than Wordsworth's, interesting though Wordsworth's is, with the interest that belongs to the actions of any one who sets himself to climb the hill Difficulty. Great as was Wordsworth's self-command, and much

reason as we have to believe that he would have come through any ordeal untouched, he was never subjected to so trying an ordeal as Scott. Scott's life has this supreme attraction for us, that, by the accident of events, he was submitted to the test.

Of the circumstances of his origin there is little that need here be said. Genius, an inexplicable thing, finds in Scott's case, as in others, only a trifling explanation in the history of his ancestors. One sees, of course, some indications there. From his mother, a lady with a taste for books, and the daughter of an Edinburgh professor, he may be thought to have inherited a literary inclination; while his father, a Writer to the Signet, and the descendant of an old border family at the head of which stand the Dukes of Buccleuch, may pass as sponsor at once for his martial instincts, and for that "thread of the attorney" which he playfully confessed to be in him. The child is not always the father of great men. With those whose minds are unreceptive the natural inclination counts for much, for less with those to whom experience is continually bringing new thoughts and supplying an amplifying corrective to the

tendencies of youth. The most notable feature in Scott's childhood is the fortunate circumstance—a childish illness which left its trace in a lameness of the right leg—that sent him early to country scenes and open air. At his grandfather's farm at Sandy-Knowe, the locality of which is marked by the neighbouring ruin of Smailholm Tower, he laid the strong foundations of bodily and mental health. Smailholm, the mere relic of a border peel, is situated about a couple of miles from the road between Melrose and Dryburgh, where it passes Bemerside, the ancestral home of the Haigs, about whom the Rhymer's prophecy was written, and by a fiction kept fulfilled. Not an hour's walk from Smailholm, the Tweed, a few hundred feet below the highway, takes a bend of singular grace, and the tourist gazing from the spot at the turn of the road, where in after years Scott often drew rein to gaze at the most beautiful view in the lowlands, sees before him the broad river winding through a champaign country rich in hollow and wood and field, and guarded in the distance by low lines of faint blue hills. Not an hour's walk in the opposite direction lies the romantic ruin of Dryburgh Abbey, in

which Scott ultimately found a resting-place as appropriate as Wordsworth's at Grasmere. A morning's ramble will take a good walker from Smailholm to Melrose, and thence following the sweep of the Tweed, or, if he prefers it, by Bowden Moor, in either case skirting the sudden mass of the Eildon hills, to Selkirk, perched on a small acclivity and looking over the valleys of Ettrick and Yarrow. It would have been difficult to have found a spot, in which the future poet of the borderland could more suitably have passed the plastic period of childhood.

At the age of seven Scott was sent to Edinburgh High School, leaving it when twelve years old to enter Edinburgh University. That as a boy he did not distinguish himself in the precise studies of school and college, is no exception to the rule with imaginative authors. Boys are taught little but fact, since most boys, though they may have the desire, have not the capacity to deal with theory, and facts and an imaginative temperament are not readily reconciled. While more ordinary students were occupying themselves with the subjects of the schools, Shelley was amusing himself with chemistry and metaphysics, Coleridge with political discussions,

Wordsworth with his own meditations, and Scott with whatever books took his fancy. Leaving college at the early age of sixteen, he was apprenticed to a conveyancer, and became finally associated with the law in the character of an advocate in 1792. For the next ten years he pursued a variety of occupations, that of the law with tolerable assiduity, and considering his assiduity with success, that of a captain of yeomanry, and that of a collector of ballads. Besides this in these ten years he wrote something of his own, formed an unsuccessful attachment to a lady who became the wife of Sir William Forbes, and within a year after her marriage engaged himself to his future wife, Miss Charpentier. From the little evidence which we have on this subject it is, I think, clear that Scott considered himself in some degree ill-treated by his first love, and that the wound remained with him long. It is difficult to avoid seeing in the precipitation which characterized his engagement something which has the appearance of pride or pique, nor was his subsequent married life such as to warrant us in rejecting the inference. "At the distance of sixty years since and more," says Mr. Palgrave, whose name is a guarantee

that the judgment is not a harsh one, "it may be allowable to add that although attended by considerable happiness, faithful attachment on his wife's part, and much that gave a charm to life, this marriage does not appear to have satisfied the poet's inner nature." It was characteristic of Scott that he should have extracted all its good from this union, rather than have wasted days in regretting that it did not reach his ideal.

From the publication of 'The Border Minstrelsy' in 1802 we may date the beginning of his poetical career. In the twelve years which followed he gave to a delighted world his long series of verse romances. Meanwhile, prospering in his work as a lawyer, he was appointed Sheriff of Selkirkshire in 1804, and taking up his abode, as was part of his duty, in that county, remained there at the delightful house of Ashestiel till his appointment to a clerkship of Session eight years later. In this period, nothing is more surprising than his literary activity. No doubt in actual output the period of the Waverley Novels was, if not more fertile, equally so; but by that time his work as a lawyer had become less serious, his attention, confined to the working out of one imaginative vein, was less distracted,

and continual toil had become a matter of course. In those first twelve years he was new to the life of application, which his unremitting energy necessitated, and, taking up any literary work that came to his hand, he could not always find his task congenial. Fresh from his business in the Sheriff-court or as an advocate, he turned to editing Lord Somers' Tracts, or Sir Ralph Sadler's State Papers, to supervising and furnishing with adequate biographies the small libraries of prose and verse Dryden and Swift have left, or to reviewing at length the newest publications of the day. Altogether, from 1802 to 1814, there appeared with his name on the title-page, as editor or author, nearly seventy volumes. The industry of lawyers is famous, but this was the fruit of a lawyer's leisure, and of a lawyer who also found opportunity to write thirty thousand lines of verse. Poetry of all the arts demands the most single and devoted adherence, and here is a poet flinging off a series of long poems, which have never been ranked low, and which still afford to a multitude some of the happiest moments of their lives, in the intervals of business sufficient for two, and those not merely ordinary men.

On his removal from Ashestiel, Scott settled at Abbotsford, a few miles further down the Tweed, and it was there that he proceeded to build, with the profits of continual activity, and increasing popularity, the house that from the beginning to the end, as well in its furnishings as in its general outline, was the creation of its owner. I suppose he was the first poet who ever built a house; poets, not because they are wise, but because they are poor, having generally been content to live in buildings which the money of others has erected. Every one is aware how dearly he paid for his breach of this long-established custom, and every one who has visited Abbotsford must, I think, confess to a doubt whether the return even in stone and mortar was reasonably adequate. The house, always interesting for its associations, is in itself disappointing. Even the situation, in a country where at every turn one has glimpses of river and mountain, has few claims to praise. On one side the ground dips from the road to the entrance, while on the other little can be seen from the windows except the broad sweep of the Tweed, a long lumpish hill rising from its farther side, and shutting off the prospect. The

surrounding park, more suitable for a cottage *ornée* than a mansion, gives the same impression of want of space, and the rooms, with the single exception of the library, which undoubtedly has architectural beauty, are just such rooms as may be found in any town-house of moderate size. In the Castle of Lirias to which Gil Blas retired, the rooms were perhaps no bigger, but then the Castle of Lirias made no pretence of being large. It is the fault of Abbotsford that it does; the walls being built as solidly as the walls of a palace or a fortress designed to resist attack. The armoury, crowded with weapons of historic interest, is but a tiny apartment, while Scott's study, in essence the plain room of a workman with an eye to his work, is surrounded by heavy bookcases, with an iron gallery attached, and effecting no greater convenience of reference than could have been got by standing on a chair. Instead of the feudal castle which Scott, rich as for a literary man he was, never had the money to build, we have a miniature imitation not without antiquarian charm, but heavy, and confessing at every corner that the desires of the builder soared beyond his means. Abbotsford has been selected to point the moral of many

tales, designed to show that we ought not to desire a settled habitation, wherein our children's children may live. Had the house been plainer it is probable that an ambition so laudable and universal would have escaped the censure of those who forget the pointed saying in Ecclesiastes—"Wisdom is good together with an inheritance, and profitable unto them that see the sun."

Shortly after his removal to Abbotsford Scott struck the imaginative vein, which was to yield him not only fortune, but the larger and more enduring part of his renown. One day in 1814, while rummaging among his papers at his house in Castle Street, Edinburgh, he came upon the fragment of a novel which he had begun in 1805 and then laid aside. This was the first seven chapters of 'Waverley,' and, taking it up again, he finished the first of the Waverley Novels in three weeks. A rough computation establishes the fact that had he continued producing at this extraordinary speed he would have completed the whole series in less than three years. Such a task was beyond the powers of a mortal, but the calculation has interest as showing the manner of his working, the determination with which

he addressed himself to any given employment, and the power of his magnificent faculties when thoroughly aroused. To the production of novels these faculties were now to be chiefly directed, though it was still as always his habit to seek relaxation, with him but another name for change of occupation, in the lighter literary work of a reviewer and editor. In return there finally came to him a reputation greater than that which, in his lifetime, any other English writer had enjoyed.

Fortunate in those days he must have appeared to be, set far above the reach of fate; and the stranger who any morning happened to see him, as he strolled about his estate giving orders for new planting or pruning of trees, must have thought that here at least he had warrant for neglecting the advice of Solon to call no man happy till after his death. But the wisdom of that old and cautious pronouncement was to have a new exemplification when in the January of 1826, the failure of Constable brought Ballantyne's printing house, in which Scott was a partner, down with a crash. The story of the business transactions which resulted in this catastrophe is long and intricate, nor is it pos-

sible in a short space to speak of the matter in detail.¹ Every one will agree with the conclusions at which Mr. Hutton arrives, that Ballantyne, though his want of business sense may have been exaggerated, was not a capable business man, and that Scott was too antiquarian in his tastes, and too impulsively kind in regard to the productions of his friends to be a good publisher. But besides this it has, I think, been shown that his conduct was wanting in prudence. Aware that Ballantyne's business was in itself by no means in a satisfactory condition, he went on spending at his usual generous rate, trusting, as it proved, blindly, that Constable, on whose credit, pledged for him and for which he had pledged himself, both he and Ballantyne ultimately relied, was as "firm as Ben Lomond." So high was his trust in Constable that the failure, when it came, came to him as a stunning shock, though looking back now on the three ends of the string, one can see that there was no other likely outcome to the strange tangle of cross liabilities and constant expenditure in

¹ The reader may consult Mr. Leslie Stephen's article in the 'Cornhill Magazine' for April 1897, where the subject is discussed.

which he was mixed up. Curiosity may ask how far Scott realized that his own lavish outlay was putting a strain on his resources to which it was a risk to subject them. All the evidence goes to show that he thought himself well within the mark, and it is true that had Constable been financially sound, Ballantyne's difficulties would, with the aid of Scott's Midas touch, have proved temporary. Still it is impossible not to feel that it was no part of prudence for him, spending and borrowing as he did, not to have been exhaustively informed as to the state of his affairs, or for him, relying devotedly on Constable's soundness, not to have retrenched to secure that the business in which he was primarily concerned was reasonably sound. But if there is something here which makes Scott at least partially responsible for his own undoing, and not, as he has so often been represented, the mere martyr of unavoidable chance, it was a responsibility of a kind which could only have attached to a nature generously rich. Not merely in the way he met his troubles, but in the course which led to them one catches the character of the man. When the blow fell, two courses were open: to surrender what he pos-

sessed, and start life afresh, or to ask for time, and discharge the heavy burden piece by piece. Of these courses he took, as all the world knows, the manlier one. The objections to the first were indeed patent. By adopting it his house and cherished possessions would have gone to strangers, and his creditors obtained perhaps little more than half what was due. Everything, for a man of indomitable energy, was in favour of the second. The way was difficult, but at the end there was the recompense of household gods preserved, and in taking it there was the consolation, dear to a man of worth, that honour was satisfied. The consequences of an over-sanguine habit have never been met in a spirit of more earnest fortitude. To annul the effects of the catastrophe Scott worked with added determination, but even he could not support the strain. Coming at the close of a career, so full of fruitful industry, untroubled by calamity, and beyond expectation fortunate, there is an irresistible pathos in this dying struggle, the last effort of noble powers; yet something of the kind was needed to show the resources of that even and patient character, and to give to his life that touch of intimate human interest which

an unhappy world misses in the records of too easily successful days.

Sir Walter Scott, to those who are fond of such distinctions, the chief glory of Scottish literature, and to those who are justly proud of common interests, common blood, and common speech, one of the chief glories of the English tongue, lived a life, which, when we consider the variety and compass of his writings, is of perpetual and perplexing interest to his biographers. It was not that his ambitions were those of other men—reputation, wealth, family, and lands. Shakespeare himself was not exempt from these; the purchaser of New Place loved his position of dignity in his native town. Unless great writers are to be entirely free from thoughts of self, and perhaps no one who ever was, was ever a great writer, it is not easy to see how they can avoid sharing the most dignified of personal ambitions, those of family.

“To join the choir invisible
Of those immortal dead who live again,”

is but an impalpable immortality at the best, but to live in the affections of descendants, to be associated for generations with the spot of earth

they inherit, is, in a real sense, to escape the grave. One wonders how many marriages would be made were it not for this desire, warm and comforting in the very notion, to live on in a perpetual series of selves. The visionary or envious alone despise or affect to despise it, and it is not here that Scott's life is perplexing. It is perplexing because it was the life of a dramatist pure and simple. Shakespeare, no one can read his plays and doubt it, was not only a dramatist: he shared—as to the particulars of his opinions of course we shall never know anything—the passions, doubts, and difficulties of his characters. Scott, and in his case there is ample evidence to support the assertion, was a pure narrator. Has he to tell us that a man was a sceptic, a Jew, a Mohammedan, or a pagan; that a person was looked at askance on account of his religion, or trade, or politics; that a man was enthusiastic in some cause or interest—he tells us so and is done with it. He is not warmed or troubled by the hundreds of differing opinions which find dramatic expression in his pages. One sees here perhaps the “thread of the attorney,” a touch of the legal method not friendly to deep sympathies, the

working out of the habit too readily learnt in the law courts, of treating the passions and views of men as mere material for observation. But this tendency, though fostered by his training, was natural to him, and whatever profession he had followed, would have shown itself. It was not merely that he had no bias towards enthusiasm—one would not have wished him to have that—but that he carried his aversion to it so far as often to cramp his interests. He judged calmly of practice, but at the same time, a price he need not have paid, he allowed his mind on its theoretical side to grow cold. Thus, for instance, where Mr. Hutton says, "Of enthusiasm in religion Scott always spoke very severely," and quotes him as complaining to Lord Montague of such enthusiasm "as makes religion a motive and a pretext for particular lines of thinking in politics and temporal affairs," one may be pardoned if one sees there the practical man. To appreciate the danger that the actual business of life should be directed by visionary dogmas, or that the standard of conduct should not be that agreeable to the general reason, but that shifting one seen by differing faiths, is surely to do no more than to keep one's

grasp on affairs. So to think is no proof that the speculative side of the mind has withered, so to think is not to be separated from the greatest abstract thinkers; but what separated Scott not only from the greatest thinkers, but from thinkers of real weight was that he did not stop here. His distrust of the vagaries of speculation was a sign of mental health; it was a serious weakness that with speculation for its own sake he should have taken no active concern. Susceptible to moral and religious impressions in a certain sense he peculiarly was, but he possessed by nature, and acquired by training and habit, a dislike to exercising his mind freely among differences, and, as a consequence, when he came to speak of them he was not stirred. It was a natural result. He allowed himself partly consciously, partly unconsciously, to fall into a groove. He accepted pleasantly, and if we did not know it from his life, his novels would be proof enough, the strange atmosphere about him. A man of great humanity, he seems never to have seen the criminal's case against society, nor to have realized, for example, that duelling, a mode of settling a dispute which gave fearful odds against

the weak, was a practice he should not sanction. He had no anxiety for discussion, it was natural that people should accept whatever was held in their locality, and unnatural they should not. He was an omnivorous reader, and yet it is difficult to conceive of him as startled out of his customary phlegm by any treatise on government: had he lived to read Schopenhauer's grave and airy discussion on the respective advantages of monogamy and polygamy he would have gone in laughing to dinner, wondering how any one could concern himself with matters so removed from English practice. The religious and moral ideas of his nation came home to him to all appearance easily: a country gentleman, he was content to work along with the views of country gentlemen however some might miss his intellectual approval. It is true it is impossible to tell what passed in the interior of a mind of the calibre of Scott's, but if he experienced that "warfare of the soul" which disturbed Shakespeare's equanimity, it left no trace. Such opinions as he held, he came to hold without the reserve of dubiety, and though always, as a matter of feeling, with good-tempered tolerance, yet with what came near a

refusal to reason. He had heard, but he was not interested in the opposite side; the accident of his surroundings took the edge from his inquiry.

It is simple to say that here, not in his views but in his manner of holding them, in his regarding orthodoxy and commonplace as if they were really matter of course, lies his weakness as a writer, to emphasize the truism that in no such way can a man attain that elasticity of mind which is the general characteristic of the great. It was a damaging attitude doubtless: "Foolish is the wayfaring man," as the old English writer has it, "who takes the smooth way which misleads him, and forsakes the rough one which leads him to the city." The difficult thing is to explain how it came about that a writer so constituted accomplished the work he did. One may suppose perhaps that the sympathy of the heart where it exists in sufficient strength will enable an author to dispense at least partially with the sympathy of the head. Anyhow there must be some explanation how it happens that Scott, the least intellectually sympathetic of great writers, has left a body of work of different and inferior quality indeed, but comparable in amplitude and variety, with the productions of a mind

of the width of Shakespeare's. Carlyle said no more than what was true when he said of Scott that it was "of other stuff that great men are made." It is commonly of other stuff, but the enigmatical thing is that it happened otherwise than commonly with one of the greatest of men.

It is the excess of pedantic nicety to deny that epithet to the man, which we grant so readily to his work. A writer is to be judged by his achievement. After all perhaps the distinction between Scott's character and production is one of which it is easy to make too much. In his life there was observable the same play of wide and sympathetic feeling, the same power of humorous and truthful observation, and the same spirit of placid rectitude, while to consider his writings attentively is to find a partial explanation why he who, to say no more, left various fields of mental activity untravelled, has become so especially the companion of men of the most various temperaments. That the *Waverley Novels* were written by one man, is a statement both the bearing and weight of which we are liable to forget. If we appreciate its significance we shall not only understand the secret of Scott's outstanding greatness, we shall

also gain some idea, since it is on the bulk of his production that he depends, how it was possible for him to dispense with qualities we are accustomed to look for, and to maintain a consistent sobriety of feeling we are accustomed to miss in one whose fortune it is to capture the world by the vital force of a single masterpiece.

And if this was his pre-eminent achievement, it is necessary to lay stress on it, since its importance is readily under-estimated by those to whom the fact has long been familiar. The earth goes round the sun, we tell a child, and the child has nothing like the difficulty of the contemporaries of Galileo in believing it. Before we realize the improbability of one man's producing the Waverley Novels, we are told that they are the production of one author, and yet on the face of it the statement is so improbable that during the long period of Scott's carefully guarded anonymity the public as a whole believed that several hands were engaged on the marvellous series. Before we can have any adequate conception of the greatness of his achievement, we must try to create for ourselves the same difficulty of belief.

Shakespeare, like every great and various

author, owes his place in part to his variety as well as to his greatness, but Shakespeare owes it only in part. Had he written only one or two of half-a-dozen plays, for example, 'Twelfth Night,' 'Antony and Cleopatra,' 'Hamlet,' 'Othello,' 'Lear,' or 'Macbeth,' his supremacy would still be undisputed. Outside Shakespeare's works there are in our language no fanciful and romantic comedies which can be compared with 'Twelfth Night,' no Roman plays with 'Antony and Cleopatra,' no dramas of thought with 'Hamlet,' no dramas of passion with 'Othello,' and no tragedies as awful as 'Lear' or 'Macbeth.' It was a wonderful thing that the same man who wrote those plays should also have written 'Romeo and Juliet,' 'Henry IV.,' 'Timon of Athens,' and the 'Winter's Tale'; it was a wonderful thing that he should have written more than twenty others. The range, the variety, the exhaustlessness of Shakespeare's mind will always be a familiar topic for wonder, so much so indeed that we are apt to forget how astonishing it was that he should have produced any one of his greater efforts. But Shakespeare, though he owes much to his variety, does not depend

upon it. Of the author of the Waverley Novels the reverse may be said. His position of pre-eminence among English novelists is secured to him from the fact, that he was not only a great but a prolific and various writer, that he produced the whole series of admirable works which stretches from 'Waverley' to 'The Fair Maid of Perth.'

As to which, in a general sense—and those who hold views on this subject must be understood to hold them in a general sense—is the best of these productions, opinion has long been divided. For the purpose of definitely raising the question both of their combined and particular merits, it will be convenient to select several of those for which this high claim has been advanced. To select all, and so to ensure the satisfaction of every taste, would be to provide a list of inordinate length. In the selection of 'Waverley,' 'The Antiquary,' 'Old Mortality,' 'Rob Roy,' 'The Bride of Lammermoor,' and 'St. Ronan's Well,' a *via media* will be found. Taking these novels, then, it will be our business not to press any merely individual opinion about them, but to ask ourselves what rank in public estimation Scott as a novelist would have held

had he left a few or only one of those books all claiming, according to various criticisms, the honour of being his masterpiece.

‘Waverley’ and ‘Rob Roy’ are novels dealing with the period which is covered by the history of the Stuarts. Thackeray has left a novel dealing with the same period, ‘The History of Henry Esmond,’ and the world if it were given its choice between ‘Esmond’ and ‘Waverley’ would not hesitate for long; nay, it is even questionable whether ‘Waverley’ and ‘Rob Roy’ together have given more pleasure than Thackeray’s book. It was only the other year that Mr. Stevenson, an exquisite essayist and a writer of great power, but not, it will be granted, a novelist to be named with Scott, produced his charming story ‘Catriona,’ dealing like ‘Rob Roy’ with Highland character, and though with less, yet with comparable success.

In ‘The Antiquary,’ as in ‘Guy Mannering,’ Scott concerned himself chiefly with the portrayal of character, depending there very little upon the effect of his incident, and seeking there no aid from history. Nor does ‘The Heart of Midlothian’ depend for its effect on its historical detail, on the long excursus on the Porteous

riots, or even on the admirable figures of the Duke of Argyll and the Queen, and though the main incident is essential to the story, the novel stands not so much for the interest of the narrative as for that its wonderful group of characters excites. Considering the three as novels of character, it may be asked if their characters are more interesting or more life-like than those drawn by Fielding or Thackeray, or even on occasion by Smollett, or, to put the question in a less general form, are Bertram or Lovel comparable with Pendennis or Tom Jones: is Lucy Bertram, the most living of the ladies in the three novels, comparable with Sophia: are Oldbuck and Edie Ochiltree better than Colonel Newcome, Parson Adams and Partridge: are Madge Wildfire, Meg Merrilees and Jeanie Deans, admirable as they are, beyond comparison, as pieces of character painting, with Mrs. Honour, Tabitha Bramble, Becky Sharpe and Blanche Amory? It will hardly happen that the answers to all these questions are in the affirmative: it will be conceded that Scott here, where as some think he is at his best, does no more than divide the honours with Fielding and Thackeray. And if we take the novels as

a whole, the result is not more consistent with the theory of his supremacy. Neither the 'Antiquary,' strong as it is in character, nor 'The Heart of Midlothian,' which has strength both of character and incident, can be placed quite by the side of 'Tom Jones'; and though 'Guy Mannering' is a far less partial picture of life than 'Vanity Fair,' and has none of the rambling prolixity of narrative which disfigures 'Pendennis' and the 'Newcomes,' it is doubtful indeed if it is as brilliant as 'Vanity Fair,' or as great an achievement as either of Thackeray's two later novels. The 'Antiquary' is a finer work than 'Humphry Clinker,' in every sense a nobler production, but had Scott left only the 'Antiquary,' it would be rash to predict that it would survive Smollett's masterpiece.

'St. Ronan's Well' challenges comparison with the work of two separate schools, with novelists such as Miss Austen, and (while totally different in manner, employing as they do dark colours) with novelists such as Richardson, in so far as it is a novel of domestic character with the one, and in so far as it is a novel of incident with the other, but it is only on the side of its incident that a serious comparison can be made.

“When it came,” says Mr. Hutton, “to describing the small differences of manner, differences not due to external habits, so much as to internal sentiment or education, or mere domestic circumstance, Scott was beyond his proper field. In the sketch of St. Ronan’s Spa, and the company at the *table d’hôte*, he is of course somewhat near the mark,—he was too able a man to fall far short of success in anything he really gave to the world; but it is not interesting. Miss Austen would have made Lady Penelope Penfeather a hundred times as amusing.” In so far then as the novel is one of domestic character and incident, and though the Scandal Club, with its rough jests and sombre merriment, is an effective background for the main tragedy, ‘St. Ronan’s Well’ does not distance Miss Austen in her own field, does not even, in the reliable judgment of Mr. Hutton, equal her. But ‘St. Ronan’s Well’ is to be considered as a tragedy, a tragedy that stands out abruptly from its intentionally frivolous setting, and for this purpose should be taken together with ‘The Bride of Lammermoor,’ a tragedy of a deeper cast, a poetical tragedy, while ‘St. Ronan’s Well’ is a tragedy in prose,

but containing no single scene in its different way more effective than the main situation in the later novel, where Clara confesses to her brother, and Mowbray, left alone to consider the total wreck of his hopes, is startled from his reverie by the rumbling wheels of Touchwood's chaise. It is to be asked if 'St. Ronan's Well,' with its tragedy breaking in on gay life, is a greater production than that work of Richardson's, where he also uses a frivolous and humdrum society as a background on which to paint the sorrows of Clarissa, as it is also to be asked if 'The Bride of Lammermoor' is an indefinitely greater poetical success than 'The Scarlet Letter,' 'The Blithedale Romance,' or 'The Marble Faun'; if Lucy Ashton, the most delicate of Scott's female portraits, is more alive and lives more in our thoughts than Hester or Zenobia or Miriam. To these questions, which suggest themselves readily, even prejudice cannot return an equivocal reply.

Of the novels mentioned, 'Old Mortality' is the last, and with it, at length, our comparisons are exhausted. Like 'Rob Roy' and 'Waverley,' it is a novel dealing with a historical period and historical events, depending no doubt more

than either of them upon the history introduced, but like them suggesting comparison with Thackeray's 'Esmond.' It does not matter so much that 'Esmond' may stand even this test, that Henry Esmond holds his own with Henry Morton, that the young prince is as good in his way as Claverhouse in his, and that Beatrix towers above Edith Bellenden: the important thing is that here is another novel which challenges comparison, and, as some think, challenges comparison more seriously than either 'Waverley' or 'Rob Roy' with the same great book to which in speaking of them reference was directed. To compare only a few of Scott's fictions with those of other writers is to get a hint of the ground on which his real claim to pre-eminence may be based. It does not consist in the merits of single books. The novels selected belong to three departments, that of the novel cast in a historical period, that of the novel of character, and that of the tragic tale, departments in which all Scott's masterpieces are contained. In none of them does he outrun competition, or if in one of them he does, he does it with difficulty—if 'The Bride of Lammermoor' is better than anything Hawthorne produced, it is not indefinitely better.

In one department alone, and curiously enough in a department in which there is none of those works commonly selected as his masterpieces, he has no rivals. It was a field which before him only indifferent novelists had entered. In a sense he discovered it. 'Waverley,' 'Rob Roy,' and 'Old Mortality' would be classified by many as historical novels, and so, no doubt, they are if we grant the name to any novel in which historical characters or events are introduced. But their object is not a historical object, and it is more correct to call them novels of character and incident placed in a historical setting. Such a novel, for instance, is 'Esmond,' and it is only by so describing it, that we shall be able to distinguish it from a novel with so different a purpose as 'Kenilworth.' There can be no absolute distinction. The main interest of 'Esmond' is not historical, and the same is true of 'Rob Roy,' but 'Waverley' depends in great measure on the figure and surroundings of Charles Edward, and the chief personage in 'Old Mortality,' Balfour of Burley, is not only historical, but acts, as far as his main actions are concerned, in accordance with history. Nevertheless Scott has a series of novels which

can be broadly distinguished from 'Waverley' and 'Old Mortality,' and which produce the same kind of effect that history produces. In such a tale as 'Quentin Durward' we forget the story, and remember only the picture that is there presented of Louis XI and his court. It is of course not always easy to say on which side of a line of this kind any particular novel is to be placed, but what a number of novels has Scott in which the fictitious story that is woven into the historical events, is but a kind of background to them, but threads to bring them together. In 'Kenilworth,' though the history is extremely fictitious, there is quite a small element of intentional fiction.

In those pieces of animated history, in those reigns revived, what must surprise the reader most is the number of widely differing historical personalities with which Scott has dealt. In 'Ivanhoe' and 'The Talisman' he brings back Richard and his Crusaders, in 'Kenilworth' Elizabeth, in 'The Abbot' Mary Queen of Scots, in 'The Fortunes of Nigel' James I, and in 'Quentin Durward' Louis XI. It would be difficult to select from the whole of history three monarchs more different in character and

habits than Richard and Louis and James, and though the contrast between Mary and Elizabeth comes, so to speak, to the hand of every historical student, it is nowhere more effective than in Scott's pages. And this effect he produces, not by the aid of historical learning and accuracy, for which he was not specially distinguished, but by a species of historical instinct. For anything like these novels we have to go back to Shakespeare. Scott's Elizabeth, his Mary, his Richard, his Louis, his James, actually live,—live as vividly in our own imaginations as Shakespeare's Henrys. His princes are princes as unmistakably as his peasants are peasants, and what is more, he can distinguish between them; he can give the man, not necessarily the exact historical figure, which is quite another matter, but the individual and his traits as easily in their case as when he is dealing with Caleb Balderstone or Edie Ochiltree. In one respect he even surpasses Shakespeare, surpasses him no doubt because Shakespeare made no effort in that direction; still he surpasses him in the truth of his historical atmosphere. He gets hold of a historical period in a way Shakespeare never did. In 'Ivanhoe' and in 'Kenilworth'

we are in different worlds, whereas it would puzzle any one who read 'King John' and 'Henry V,' to tell whether the one monarch did or did not immediately succeed the other.

In this department, Scott among novelists is supreme, and from the work he achieved here, from a perusal of 'Quentin Durward' or 'Ivanhoe,' we would be justified in concluding that he was the first of historical novelists. But to say so would be to say far too little, he is the first of English novelists; and again the question suggests itself—in what is it that his pre-eminence among English novelists may be said to consist? It can hardly be on account of his supremacy in the historical novel pure and simple, since the historical novel pure and simple is, by common consent, on a lower plane of imaginative work than the novel of character or the novel of serious incident, just as the historical drama is on a lower plane than the drama proper. These historical excursions are of inferior merit, judged as mere achievements, because the artist is helped by his material, and judged as productions they are almost necessarily of inferior merit, because he is almost necessarily hampered by it. Shakespeare's genius in his

English historical plays is restrained, of course only in the historical parts, by his desire to be faithful to the facts; it is not so much restrained in his Roman plays, because there he had not, speaking generally, the same historical knowledge, and often not the same historical desire, and it is not restrained at all in such plays as 'Lear' and 'Macbeth,' because there his desires were not the desires of a historian. On this account, and it is theoretical, Scott's accepted position can hardly be explained by his success as a historical novelist; if we take the actual works themselves the matter is still clearer. To read 'Kenilworth' and 'The Fortunes of Nigel,' and to consider them as works of the imagination, is to recognize at once that they cannot be placed above the best works of other English novelists. Such work is, at least, comparable with Scott's masterpieces, and there is no reason why it should fear a comparison with those novels of his which, though the best in their particular field, are yet not, considered as works of imagination, the best things he has done.

Search as we choose through the Waverley Novels, we shall not find that there is one of

them which has not to run the risk of a doubtful judgment when compared with the best work of other novelists. Scott does not enjoy his pre-eminence over Richardson, Fielding, Thackeray and Hawthorne as the writer of novels greater than any which have been written by those authors; he enjoys it because he has left a body of work of more enduring value: it is not in the heights to which his genius reaches, but in its amplitude, its untiring excellence that his pre-eminence consists.

Thackeray has left 'Esmond' and 'Barry Lyndon,' 'Vanity Fair,' the 'Newcomes' and 'Pendennis.' Against 'Esmond' and 'Barry Lyndon' the admirer of Scott can place a whole host of novels cast in a historical setting, against Thackeray's novels of character, half-a-dozen admirable efforts, and all this without trenching on his great tragedies or his novels of history pure and simple. It is the same with the other great authors of whom I have spoken. Not Hawthorne with his extraordinary insight into the intricacies of mental character, nor Richardson with his fascinating tediousness and unquestioned tragic power, nor Fielding with his abundant and generous life can swing back

the doors of any such extended gallery, or throw open to us so large a world. The amplitude of Scott's genius is not more remarkable than its unvarying excellence. In the novel of character Fielding alone can produce a composition which need not fear comparison with Scott's best ; in the novel cast in a historical period he is eclipsed, if indeed when we think of 'Old Mortality' he is eclipsed, only by one book of Thackeray's ; in the prose tragedy with a poetical excellence it is Hawthorne alone who comes beside him ; 'St. Ronan's Well' is a worthy successor to Richardson's infinitely greater book, while in the historical novel Scott has beaten the ablest of his successors and imitators. He is always to be compared with the best ; he could do as well as anybody, or almost as well as anybody, whatever he attempted, and he has attempted and achieved far more than any other English novelist has either achieved or attempted.

This is the claim, it seems to me, which is to be made for him as a novelist, and it is this which justifies criticism, though it is not able to point to any individual novels of his which take an undisputed place, in assigning to his work as a whole a place of undisputed supremacy. Richard-

son and Hawthorne with all their excellences have limited fields, Smollett has a field exceedingly limited, even Fielding's range is circumscribed, while Thackeray's is nothing like so wide as Scott's. All these great authors moreover have a manner of looking at life: Richardson approaches it circumspectly and with an eye to the shadows, Hawthorne with the intention of lingering delicately, Smollett in rough good humour, Fielding bravely careless, and Thackeray with a smile alternately caustic and tender. But Scott has no manner; he opens his eyes and jots down quietly everything he sees. "The second and third volumes of a strange book entitled 'Tales of my Landlord,'" said Mrs. Piozzi, referring to 'Old Mortality,' "are very fine in their way. People say, 'Tis like reading Shakespeare.' I say, 'Tis as like Shakespeare as a bottle of peppermint-water is to a bottle of the finest French brandy." At this distance of time we see the merit of both judgments. Though it is quite true that Scott does not see a tenth part of what Shakespeare saw, he has the same impersonal manner of recording what he sees, and thus it happened that it was possible to suppose that the author of 'Old Mortality' was not the

author of 'Ivanhoe,' nor the author of 'The Bride of Lammermoor.'

And if he has the impersonal manner of Shakespeare, he has another affinity to him in the breadth of his range. Like Shakespeare, he found both comedy and tragedy equally natural, and roamed at will wherever his fancy led. Like Shakespeare he presents us with a world of almost infinite variety ; in the works of both we find ourselves in the streets of some great capital, among all conditions of men, and where every interest is found. The variety of his characters indeed is justly comparable with Shakespeare's, in his pages almost every profession and almost every class has its representatives.

But the comparison with Shakespeare goes no further : to see that one needs only to remember Scott's general habit of mind. "The soul's dark cottage," says Waller, in lines that keep alive a once famous name—

"The soul's dark cottage, battered and decayed,
Lets in new light through chinks which time has made"—

but the troubles that fell to Scott were matter of fact, and met in a matter-of-fact manner.

At the end of his life as at the beginning he found life solid and satisfying, and consequently though he touches Shakespeare on one side he is still far away. He had all of his characteristics that were possible for a man whatever his breadth of view, however impersonal his standpoint, however generously sympathetic by temperament, who had not the faculties, and who had not undergone the discipline of the great poets. Of Shakespeare's profound thought he had nothing; to Shakespeare's deep and concentrated feeling he was almost a stranger. It is evident in his poetry, where, far more than in the novel, the poetical faculties are in request. Never was there a more happy inspiration than that which induced him to turn from verse: a poet of fine feeling, and, at his best, of an admirable plainness, his real work was in prose. The limitations that told against him as a poet did not tell against him in anything like the same degree as a writer of novels, and it is curious to notice how in his new vehicle of expression, so well adapted to his genius, he even in some measure overcame them. But for the accident of form, there is more genuine poetry in 'The Bride of Lammermoor' than in the whole of

'Marmion.' However, even in his novels the limitations remained: he did not feel, except on the rarest occasions,¹ as the great poets feel, with that surprising directness of sympathy which lays bare to us our unknown selves; he never wandered, as the great poets wander, among those thoughts perplexed which lie at the back of every brain. For this reason, the difference between Scott's success, wonderful as it was, and Shakespeare's success is a difference in kind. As Carlyle truly says, "the difference between Scott and Shakespeare is literally immense: they are of a different species; the value of the one is not to be counted in the coin of the other," and he goes on, "we might say in a short word which covers a long matter that your Shakespeare fashions his characters from the heart outwards: your Scott fashions from

¹ One is that instanced by Mr. Trollope in his life of Thackeray, the death of Bothwell in 'Old Mortality.'

"Die, wretch!—die!" said Balfour, redoubling the thrust with better aim; and, setting his foot on Bothwell's body as he fell, he a third time transfixed him with his sword.—"Die, bloodthirsty dog! die as thou hast lived!—die, like the beasts that perish—hoping nothing—believing nothing."

"And fearing nothing!" said Bothwell. But the passage suffers when divorced from its context.

the skin inwards, never getting near the heart of them." Of all the sentences brimful of provocation which Carlyle wrote, there is perhaps not one which has provoked more adverse literary criticism than this last, and yet, when allowance is made for the writer's effective habit of speech, there is no doubt that some such distinction exists. The tag of the sentence, that Scott never got near the heart of his characters, may be left to share the fate of tags, but with this exception all that Carlyle here says is what it requires no excess of critical sanity to accept as true: Shakespeare knows his characters far more intimately than Scott. Scott—who can doubt it?—saw in the personages he has chosen to represent, in Saunders Mucklebackit, in Claverhouse, in Lucy Ashton, infinitely more than the most acute of mere observers could have seen: he knew their feelings, their thoughts, and their fancies, or all of them with which they were themselves familiar: he knew them, it might be said, as well as they knew themselves. He could penetrate beneath the skin, not it is true of an exceedingly intricate character,¹ but of almost all

¹ Rashleigh, intended as an intricate character study, is a failure. Perceiving this, his creator wearied of the task,

his characters, and represent them not merely as they appeared to the world, or as they appeared to their friends, but as they seemed to themselves. Shakespeare however can do more than this.

There is nothing more remarkable to the reader of the Waverley Novels, when he comes to think about them, than the rarity of the occasions on which he has been surprised, startled back, as it were, into himself. But in Shakespeare, these sudden surprises, these master touches of the poet are of the commonest occurrence: again and again the reader lays down the book to wonder if he is in reality the infinitely intricate animal who there stands revealed. Scott's characters rarely surprise us: in the main, though there are exceptions, their development is methodically consistent; but Shakespeare's characters are continually surprising us, the plan of our ideas is not large enough to hold them; when we begin to be satisfied that we have their measure, that we know the capacities of their beings and our own, Shakespeare takes

and when Rashleigh appears at the end of 'Rob Roy' he is a common villain enough. Compare Scott's success with such a character as Rob Roy, where the characteristics are striking but not contradictory.

his key and unlocks a hidden door. And this is the office of the great poets : in his degree it is Wordsworth's office, in a supreme degree it is Shakespeare's office, to flood with a sudden light the mind itself. To see the difference between this manner and Scott's it is necessary only to indicate a familiar comparison, that between Ravenswood and Hamlet. In the Master of Ravenswood Scott sees not merely a melancholy figure, but a melancholy man, and he gives us from the stores of his generous genius the picture of the man himself, his actions, his habits, his waking thoughts. Shakespeare, on the other hand, sees in Hamlet a mind diseased ; he thinks with him, for a time he is Hamlet ; nay, he is more, there is not a half formed fancy, not a movement of Hamlet's brain with which he is not familiar. Were the Master of Ravenswood to spring to life, he would be struck with wonder at Scott's insight, he would cry out in astonishment that any one should know so much of him, but if Hamlet were vivified he would not immediately recognize himself, and he would ask, as it has come to every one to ask, somewhere or sometime, in reading Shakespeare's plays—Is this I ?

Work of this kind is not to be found in the Waverley Novels. To their author the world in its perplexity did not lie open, and what attracted him was rather the variety than the difficulty of life. But how wide a field was that over which he swept his kindly eyes!—so wide indeed that there is no absurdity in viewing his achievement by the light of the greatest achievement in literature. Something of what Shakespeare accomplished in poetry, Scott accomplished in prose.

CHAPTER II

SCOTT AS A NOVELIST OF CHARACTER

THERE has long been a controversy, an impossible controversy, between certain men of affairs and certain literary men, as to the responsibility of fictitious literature for general depravity, and more especially for juvenile depravity. The controversy is impossible since those on one side look at literature from a mistaken though natural standpoint, the standpoint of practical morality, and those on the other take up the indefensible position that literature has no effect upon the character.

The object of art being to tell the truth, not necessarily only apparent truth, which is the province of that branch of art nicknamed realism, but the essential truth about man and his surroundings, the nearer a poet comes to doing this, the nearer a dramatist or a novelist comes to doing it, the nearer he is to artistic

success. Actions undertaken for the general welfare, and actions performed to serve some private end must find a place in the pages of a good artist as readily as exiled Dukes and Macbeths, Desdemonas and Cleopatras.

If an imaginative writer chooses to paint the world either as wholly vicious, or wholly virtuous, he is making just the same kind of mistake as if he were to leave out women or omit all notice of men. To give instances that are not disputable: if he chooses to represent vice as invariably successful, and always productive of enduring happiness, he is giving a wrong impression of the supremacy in the world of interests that are selfish; if he chooses to represent virtue as always materially rewarded, he is giving a wrong impression of the supremacy in the world of interests making for the benefit of others; in both cases he is departing from the truth which is his immediate and only concern. In both cases also he is giving an artificial stimulus, a stimulus greater than that of actual life, to the courses which he happens to represent as attended by such unusually fortunate results; but this is not his real fault, any more than it is the real fault of a winding stream, that it

takes along with it in its windings any wood that happens to fall in. The object of an artist — being truth, he is to be judged by his adherence to it or his deviation from it, and not by, what is to him a purely subsidiary matter, the effects produced, and though, as the magistrates distinguishing would say, in one of the highly fanciful cases given, the author is giving an artificial stimulus to immorality and in the other to morality, there is no real artistic difference between the two offences—except perhaps that to represent the world as immaculate is even more of a caricature than to represent it as wholly depraved. An author has no more business to distort the facts in favour of what is received as moral than he has to distort them in favour of what is received as immoral, and to represent that he has is to do incalculable mischief. This would be the true answer to return to the magistrates, not that imaginative literature has no effect upon the character, a point which they are better qualified to decide than literary men, but that imaginative literature has higher interests to consider than those of effect, the interests of truth, and that, since it is manifestly impossible for the functionaries of

any state to decide on so complicated a question as the real proportion in the world of selfish and unselfish interests, any interference of theirs could only result in the increase of one kind of lying at the expense of another. It would be the true answer, even if it were true that it was the habit of artists to occupy themselves with the world at large, and not, as is infinitely more usual, only with the piece of it to which they direct their gaze, or which they are able to see.

It would be a harsh demand to make of imaginative writers, and as a matter of literary excellence it would be utopian to expect, that their works, when considered as a whole, should give a fair picture of the whole world, but to lay it down that each separate work of theirs should do so would be out of reason fanciful. Smollett in 'Humphry Clinker' does not deal with the whole world, he makes no pretence of doing so. He does not touch on the world that is open to the poet and the philosopher; he deals with that part of it alone, and it is a large one, which is open to the average man, the man with five senses. Webster's world in 'The Duchess of Malfi' is, it has been said with admirable truth, "a world of horrid crimes and fatal dispositions,"

and that in which we live is something more than this. Even Shakespeare, wide as is his range, does not attempt to crowd the whole field of observation into a single play. He shifts his gaze from point to point, giving to one drama a tone of meditation, steeping another in the shadow of disaster, introducing us here to a world of passion, and there to a world of crime. No doubt in the long run, and on people who are competent to understand them, Shakespeare's plays produce a moral effect. They produce it much in the same way—not entirely in the same way, for we have the ordering insight of the poet to help us—as a large and varied experience produces it. But I suppose an entirely foolish person might find no experience large or varied enough to teach him wisdom, and get some harm even from Shakespeare as a whole. He is even more likely to get harm if he reads only a few of Shakespeare's plays, or the works of other authors, who, knowing the scope of their genius, do not pretend to universality. What is to prevent a man without sufficient ballast, from being flung after reading *Lear* into a condition of nerveless despondence, from learning from *Othello* only that the world is an unresisting

prey to the animal passions, or from concluding when he peruses Fielding's masterpiece, or Richardson's, that he would find his essential happiness in modelling his character on that of either of the heroes of these books? It is no impeachment of Shakespeare; great literature was not written for entirely foolish people, any more than the world was made for them, and they are as likely to suffer when they come to deal with the one as when they come to deal with the other. Every day and every generation there are those who find the world a good teacher, as there are those who complain that she is a hard mistress who teaches evil. The world would not be our world if we could not extract from it gall as well as honey; great authors would not be great authors if they did not speak truly of the world. If an author speaks truly, if he represents his selfish characters as occasionally possessing attraction, if he represents his unselfish characters as occasionally repellent, if he allows the good often to meet defeat, and the bad often to attain success, it must be as possible to extract harm from his pages as it is possible to extract harm from the world.

To say of an imaginative writer, as is so

frequently and proudly said of Scott, that it is impossible to extract from his volumes anything that is harmful, is in reality to say that he did not speak the whole truth about man or society: it is to lay emphasis on his capital defect. It is not so much, as French criticism urges, that he was over-nice, sensitive to the proprieties beyond what the tone of his age required, for this over-niceness of his, though seriously limiting the range of his activity, did not often affect¹ his treatment of those subjects which he did select. It is rather that he was constantly the prey—those who remember ‘The Bride of Lammermoor’ will allow that he was not always the prey—of a desire to see virtue rewarded. Things do not fall out in the world altogether so sweetly as they fall out in his novels. Lost heirs are not so often found, death-bed repentances are not so common, strong villains, when they run atilt against wounded heroes, are not so subject to apoplectic fits, sisters who prefer a rigid altruism to their instincts have sometimes to pay the price of their

¹ A forcible instance to the contrary is to be found in ‘St. Ronan’s Well,’ where Scott, with an unpleasing deference to public opinion, as foreshadowed by his publisher, minimized the circumstances which led up to the catastrophe, and with which alone it was reasonable.

austerity, and all the bad women are not dead. The history of mankind, so confused and darkened, is not a fairy tale, and if Scott has more than once made it appear so, he is the lesser artist on that account.

This is a limitation which attaches to the Waverley Novels as a whole. Their author, both as a writer and a moralist, is too facile and pleasing to convince. But though disposing of events as he does, he misses the reward which the cold and thankless service of Donna Vera in her good time brings, work so varied and so magnificent cannot but be fruitful of profit. In becoming the idol of surface moralists, he has paid the full penalty for his defects. Moral excellence, and of the same kind as Shakespeare's, Scott has in his degree, not on account but in despite of his elegant falsehoods; he owes it to his artistic excellence, which, when all deductions are allowed, is so great, to the width and essential truth of the world which he opens to us, and from contact with which we may learn far more simply than in actual life, many of the main truths which experience will teach.

The central incidents of his story he is too apt to twist into conformity with a cut and dried

scheme of rewarding and punishing, with the result that while satisfying his fancy, the picture he presents is both too brightly and too darkly coloured. To consider his novels as a whole, is to have the criticism suggested, that wherever it is the character that attracts his attention he is most excellent, even the action is most excellent; but that when he busies himself with action for its own sake, great as is his occasional success, he frequently loses his hold on things. When he lets events happen he is strong, when he proceeds to spin a story he is often weak. In the hands of a great master the method most successfully adopted seems always the most natural, but it is proper to remember that Shakespeare is never stronger than when he is doing just that, in doing which Scott is seldom at his best. Shakespeare at his best has no idea of letting a story tell itself anyhow, of allowing it to shift along to suit the needs of the slowly developing characters: like the angel which brought fortune to Addison, he "rides in the whirlwind, and directs the storm." The only novel in which Scott has adopted this manner of Shakespeare's with consistent success is 'The Bride of Lammermoor.' In general, and

largely because he was a great novelist and not a great dramatist, his manner where successful was different; his interest was in character, and when his gaze was concentrated on his characters he rarely made a mistake. Not that a novelist can afford to despise action; to do so is to become a Miss Austen and not a Scott; but that the genius of the novel inclining in another direction, he is likely to err when he devotes exclusive attention to it.

From this point of view, 'The Antiquary' is the novel which is fullest of instruction for the critic. The main interest is centred in a group of characters depicted with loving accuracy. The world in which Oldbuck, the Mucklebackits, and Edie Ochiltree move is the real world; in the whole of the Waverley Novels there is no healthier or saner atmosphere, but the backbone of the story, that part of it on which the fortunes of the hero turn, has no real relation with the characters displayed: it is out of tone, foisted in like a fragment from 'Macbeth' among the greenwood of 'As You Like It.' This story, intended partly to sustain the reader's interest by a series of striking events, and partly to show the operation of certain moral laws, working, it may be said, by

no means so much without exception as artists turned moralists suppose, fails as a morality because it is unreal, and as a record of action because it is superfluous. However, no one remembers it, no one cares in the least about the Earl of Glenallan or his bad and dead mother, or the desperate occurrences with which they are connected. With our pleasure while we are reading the novel they may interfere, but they do not intrude themselves upon our recollection.

'The Antiquary,' first published in 1816, was the third of Scott's novels in order of production. In his Advertisement to the first edition he speaks of the three as follows—

"The present work completes a series of fictitious narratives, intended to illustrate the manners of Scotland at three different periods. 'Waverley' embraced the age of our fathers, 'Guy Mannering' that of our own youth, and 'The Antiquary' refers to the last ten years of the eighteenth century. I have, in the two last narratives especially, sought my principal personages in the class of society who are the last to feel the influence of that general polish which assimilates to each other the manners of different nations."

Something then, as he elsewhere tells us, of the licence of the historical novelist, Scott always assumed to himself. By throwing the scene a

little back from his day he was enabled to dispense with the minute accuracy in point of detail expected from a novelist who deals with manners immediately contemporary, and to devote a greater part of his attention to the truth of nature. The device was singularly happy. Speaking of a time just past, he availed himself of the licence of the historical novelist, without, as was essential for novels dealing with character and manners as much as with events, losing familiarity with the customs depicted.

As a novel of character, 'The Antiquary' is the most remarkable of Scott's productions. Nowhere is he a more faithful observer of the turns which differing personalities take, nowhere does he give a more living picture of human beings, and this he does without aid from incident. Given the story of 'Old Mortality,' there are many novelists who could have written not 'Old Mortality' indeed, but a good novel. A bad one, with the story of 'The Antiquary,' almost any novelist but Scott would have written. Properly speaking, there are two stories in 'The Antiquary,' the first extremely simple, the ostensible object of which is only to bring the characters together, and the second long and

detailed, containing the bulk of the plot. A young man about whom nothing is known, and probably as in fairy tales a prince in disguise, has a series of uneventful adventures. As far as the story is concerned the interest of the reader is not excited till he perceives that the mystery will somehow be cleared up. All that precedes is merely a preamble to the tale of wrong and injury which is bound up with the fortunes of the house of Glenallan. It is instructive to notice how Scott, in whom the genius of the novel shows itself at every turn, makes use of those two sets of incidents. Out of the simple materials of the first he constructs a perfectly natural story sufficient to allow of the development of a variety of characters. Oldbuck, going his rounds as the laird of Monkbarns, introduces us to the Mucklebackits, a family of fishers, and to Edie Ochiltree, a wandering beggar. Lovel, becoming a guest at Oldbuck's house, introduces us to its inmates, Miss Grizel, Mary M'Intyre, her brother Hector, and the dependents Caxton and Jenny. Sir Arthur Wardour's credulity brings us into contact with the amusing Douster-swivel, the general curiosity in the village about Lovel affords opportunity for the portrayal of a

number of rustic characters, while the rising of the tide brings out the deeper and more serious side of the principal personages. It is a matter of difficulty for an author to give in any single production the benefits of a large experience. But in 'The Antiquary,' as in many of his greater productions, Scott manages to do so. One feels that the delineator of Oldbuck is familiar with a world of extensive range. His treatment of the second set of incidents is equally interesting. There, no doubt, he is wide of the mark; he stumbles perfunctorily through his farrago of adventure, which, if an argument to 'The Antiquary' were to be written, would take up the greater part, throwing no new light upon his characters and producing no pleasure, but also somehow, and this it is that shows how admirable his instinct was, without leaving anything that clings to the memory or destroys the effect of the vital part of the book. Had a lesser artist written 'The Antiquary,' a novelist with a less safe instinct for his art, the memory of Lord Glenallan and his dark ancestors, figures suited to the kind of tragedy in vogue last century, would have been all we should have carried away. To combine the two sets of incidents

without detriment to the one or the other was of course impossible, but that he should even perfunctorily have attempted it throws a curious light upon Scott's manner of working. To find Lovel a family and fortune was no such difficult task, as to preclude its being done soberly, nor was there anything to prevent Scott's telling us, had he been content to shape the second part of the story to what his genius had made of the first, that the mystery was no great mystery after all, and that Lovel had left his home under a cloud of suspicion which like other clouds finally lifted. For the introduction of improbabilities there was no real necessity. If they were to be introduced, if the reader's interest was to be excited by new and surprising occurrences, how easy it would have been for a writer of Scott's resource to have effected his purpose in another manner! A touch of confidence would have propitiated the reader, and even a totally unlooked-for shower of material blessings accompanied by a suspicion of laughter, a light-hearted journey into the land where the long-lost heirs of great houses play with ingots of silver would have passed as the *dénouement* of a novel. Flights of fancy are not to be eyed too strictly, and if the

poet or novelist ends his tale laughing it must be a preposterous conclusion that will give offence. There was never the reader of 'As You Like It' who was displeased with Duke Frederick's sudden conversion. The matter is otherwise where no such concession is made. Serious improbabilities come oddly in the midst of a plain narrative, and to introduce in a work-a-day world a sombre melodrama is what, one would think, no great author would attempt.

It is generally rash to lay down abstract propositions, but it may at least be said that it is extremely troublesome to introduce Tragedy in Comedy. Comedy, as Shakespeare and Scott have shown, may be employed to give relief to feelings excited by Tragedy. Tragedy is a strain upon the feelings, and to introduce a spice of Comedy, not in itself inconsistent with the tragic intentions of the artist, and even where the result is to intensify the gloom, is to shift the strain. The reader is grateful for the rest. But a man who reads a comedy does not hope, does not expect that his feelings will suddenly be harrowed. The least touch of caprice in a call upon his emotions will perplex and annoy him, and consequently if Tragedy is to be in-

troduced in Comedy, and especially if it is to be introduced in a comedy of manners, it must be done by the most gentle of transitions; the tragic incident must have nothing improbable about it, nothing that depends upon the excitation of the imaginative faculty; it must spring naturally out of the concerns of every day. That these are commonplaces is true, but it is also true that they are commonplaces which Scott in the main action of 'The Antiquary' sets at defiance. It is the more surprising since when he was content to take things as they came, and not to trouble himself with fantastic stories of guilt and retribution, he had perhaps as much as any man, and certainly more than any English novelist, the rare power of slipping from the domain of Comedy into that of passion and feeling, of showing how amid the concerns of ordinary life the heart may be stirred. Indeed he is nowhere more powerful than here. It is difficult to introduce Tragedy in Comedy, but he has done it often; his sympathy is so human that he passes with the gentlest of transitions from mere matter of fact to the poetry that so often lies beneath it; he knew the secret, as Wordsworth knew the secret, of making a little action great.

The following scene from 'The Antiquary,' to which it is only necessary to premise that Mucklebackit's eldest son Steenie had been drowned, while fishing, a few days before, will serve better than further comment—

"When Oldbuck came in front of the fisherman's hut, he observed a man working intently, as if to repair a shattered boat which lay upon the beach, and, going up to him, was surprised to find it was Mucklebackit himself. 'I am glad,' he said, in a tone of sympathy—'I am glad, Saunders, that you feel yourself able to make this exertion.'

"'And what would ye have me to do,' answered the fisher gruffly, 'unless I wanted to see four children starve, because ane is drowned? It's weel wi' you gentles, that can sit in the house wi' handkerchers at your een when ye lose a friend; but the like o' us maun to our wark again, if our hearts were beating as hard as my hammer.'

"Without taking more notice of Oldbuck he proceeded in his labour; and the Antiquary, to whom the display of human nature under the influence of agitating passions was never indifferent, stood beside him, in silent attention, as if watching the progress of the work. He observed more than once the man's hard features, as if by the force of association, prepare to accompany the sound of the saw and hammer with his usual symphony of a rude tune hummed or whistled, and as often a slight twitch of convulsive expression showed that, ere the sound was uttered, a cause for suppressing it rushed upon his mind. At length, when he had patched a considerable rent, and was beginning to mend another, his feelings appeared altogether to derange the power of attention

necessary for his work. The piece of wood which he was about to nail on was at first too long ; then he sawed it off too short ; then chose another equally ill adapted for the purpose. At length, throwing it down in anger, after wiping his dim eye with his quivering hand, he exclaimed, 'There is a curse either on me or on this auld black bitch of a boat, that I have hauled up high and dry, and patched and clouted sae mony years, that she might drown my poor Steenie at the end of them, an' be d—d to her !' and he flung his hammer against the boat, as if she had been the intentional cause of his misfortune. Then recollecting himself, he added, 'Yet what needs ane be angry at her, that has neither soul nor sense ?—though I am no that muckle better mysell. She's but a rickle o' auld rotten deals nailed thegither, and warped wi' the wind and the sea—and I am a dour carle, battered by foul weather at sea and land till I am maist as senseless as hersell. She maun be mended though again' the morning tide—that's a thing o' necessity.'

"Thus speaking, he went to gather together his instruments and attempt to resume his labour, but Oldbuck took him kindly by the arm. 'Come, come,' he said, 'Saunders, there is no work for you this day—I'll send down Shavings the carpenter to mend the boat, and he may put the day's work into my account—and you had better not come out to-morrow, but stay to comfort your family under this dispensation, and the gardener will bring you some vegetables and meal from Monkbarns.'

'I thank ye, Monkbarns,' answered the poor fisher ; 'I am a plain-spoken man, and hae little to say for mysell ; I might hae learned fairer fashions frae my mither lang syne, but I never saw muckle gude they did her ; however, I thank ye. Ye were aye kind and neighbourly, whatever folk says o' your being near and close ; and I hae often said in thae times when they were ganging to raise

up the puir folk against the gentles—I hae often said, ne'er a man should steer a hair touching to Monkbarns while Steenie and I could wag a finger—and so said Steenie too. And, Monkbarns, when ye laid his head in the grave, (and mony thanks for the respect), ye saw the moults laid on an honest lad that likit you weel, though he made little phrase about it.'

"Oldbuck, beaten from the pride of his affected cynicism, would not willingly have had any one by upon that occasion to quote to him his favourite maxims of the Stoic philosophy. The large drops fell fast from his own eyes, as he begged the father, who was now melted at recollecting the bravery and generous sentiments of his son, to forbear useless sorrow, and led him by the arm towards his own home."

It is in such passages, into which the narrative imperceptibly glides, that Scott's power of truthful observation is especially revealed. He is not more truthful here than when he is dealing with the crotchets of the Antiquary, or with the manners of Edie Ochiltree, but his truthfulness is more apparent. As in the world we do not know any one till sorrow has touched him, so Scott's characters are so much a part of the world we see, that but for such incidents we should miss their best part. A lesser artist, without that height of self-reliance which is the prerogative of conscious power, would have told us plainly and at length all of which he conceived

Oldbuck's nature to be capable, or, despising this, would have invented some trivial accidents to show early the full variety of the character. A different artist working by a more poetical method would from the beginning, no matter if the circumstances were ordinary, have given us the key to the man. Scott is content to wait till in the course of the narrative everything is shown. As patient as Richardson, though far less tedious, he unrolls a bit of the world and lets his characters go their way. They appear and impress us, just as they appear and impress Lovel, just as they would appear and impress us in actual life. Lovel meets a chance acquaintance by the ferry, and we see this stranger then as he would be seen by any passer-by, a testy, somewhat crotchety, but withal good-humoured man. He does not open himself to Lovel at once. We are not at once told all, but gradually as he warms to his young companion, the most striking of his crotchets begins to obtrude itself. It is the Antiquary who shows Lovel the Roman remains, it is the Antiquary who quarrels with Sir Arthur, and it is only little by little, when the party of his friends are caught by the tide, when he goes to Lovel with his kindly offer of

assistance, when he assures Mucklebackit that he will pay for a day's carpentering, that Oldbuck comes before us. Nothing could be more natural than this, for what can be more natural than simple nature? Nothing in its own way could be finer, and nothing, if we exclude those occasions on which a call is made on the highest poetical art, more artistic. The more we read about Scott's characters the better we know them; the more he writes about them the further he works himself into their heart. It is amazing to see how patiently, his mind being made up that his patience would be rewarded, he sets himself to develop the intricacies of an interesting nature. To the thoughtless Edinburgh student, to the self-communing Edinburgh professor, what was Andrew Gemmels but a picturesque, intrusive, and impertinent beggar? What was he more at the first look to a particular Edinburgh student with whom the world has concern? But the excellence of this student was that with him the first look was seldom the last. To see in Andrew Gemmels something more than others saw was indeed but the fruit of a closer and more patient scrutiny, but to see in him Edie Ochiltree was to bring the creative

imagination to work on what had been observed. However, Scott does not drift from his moorings; if he sees a statue in a block of marble it is out of that identical piece of marble that the statue is to be hewn. When Ravenswood bids farewell to Lucy, he repeats the words ascribed to him in the old legend on which 'The Bride of Lammermoor' was founded; the circumstances of Jeanie Deans are closely analogous to those of Helen Walker; and Edie at his first entrance with his "Praetorian here and Praetorian there," does not essay a flight—except that the humour of no real beggar was ever so spontaneous an outgrowth—beyond the capacity of his real counterpart. He is a personage, interesting certainly, but chiefly interesting from the strong dash of insolence in his sturdy independence. If this is to mimic to the life, it is still to mimic, but the arts of a however admirable and in-artificial mimicry are left behind as Edie comes more prominently forward, as Scott makes him and the reader well acquainted, as we see developing before us the possibility of great strength and resource, and a capacity for extraordinary loyalty. Here again there is no effort of the author, circumstances speak for him; it

is not an intrusive beggar whom at the end of the book we see standing silent before the magistrate. But perhaps in the whole of this masterpiece there is no better instance of Scott's power of elucidating character than that afforded by his treatment of the family of Mucklebackit. They are fishers, and what is the business of fishers but to sell fish? We should be astonished to find them doing anything else, and consequently at the beginning of the book we find them doing that, chaffering with Jenny or Miss Grizel, or Oldbuck, and just as if Scott was not to find among them some of the finest even of his pictures of the troubles of the poor, the simple funeral, and the grief of Saunders.

'The Antiquary' affords also a number of admirable instances of Scott's method of dealing with his less complicated characters, if indeed the method is not less a different one than the same method applied to different circumstances. A good-natured servant-wench, a well-behaved girl, a typical Scotch gentlewoman, a hectoring captain, a loquacious barber, a German charlatan, these are characters which need no probing; an ordinary observer is competent to grasp the whole of them at once, and consequently in

each case there is a particularity in their introduction. We are told more about them on their first appearance, than we are told about Oldbuck or Edie. In daylight they would be clear enough, and in the *Waverley Novels* we are in daylight. Jenny, Mary M'Intyre, Miss Grizel, Captain M'Intyre, Caxton and Douster-swivel—what would we miss in these characters if we met them in the society of Fairport? Little; and so Scott spends some time in showing us, by the aid of his humorous touchstone, just what they are, and in telling us all about them. Thus with his simpler as with his more intricate characters his method is in reality the same. It is as if experience were to take us by the hand and to explain to us how she works. The great dramatic poets have another manner. In their productions we do not merely find experience compressed, we are brought into contact with an admirable and instantaneous intuition. We get on terms as quickly with their intricate as with their simple characters. Hamlet, for example, springs on the page as Pallas from the head of Zeus all armed. For all purposes we know him as well at the end of the first act as at the end of the fifth; but it is idle to

emphasize the distinction almost essential between a novelist dealing with a world of prose and a dramatist in his most rapid and poetical moods. To bring the man before us immediately needs not only the insight of the poet, but often his constant reliance on striking and poetical events. In depicting character generally, and especially in that part of 'The Antiquary' which deals with mundane affairs, Scott adopts a method that comes more naturally to a novelist. For a novel, when all is said, is a familiar tale, and we catch its peculiar note most easily where the novelist ambles familiarly along without troubling himself with the arts of dramatic construction. The best part of 'The Antiquary' shows the novel doing work which the drama has not patience to accomplish, work too of infinite value, since it is not given to every one to follow the poets into their sudden and elemental world. To read the book is not certainly to have the imagination greatly quickened, but to read it—to read of Edie, of Oldbuck and his household—is to see the plain everyday world as we should not otherwise see it, till circumstances and trouble had enlarged and softened our vision. It is a high panegyric

of a man's work to say that it affects us in the same manner as life; it is a still higher one to say that it gives to youth the power of seeing life as it is seen by the experienced and kind.

It is not often that one finds among the Waverley Novels a book like 'The Antiquary,' of which one can confidently affirm that it would be just as good as it is had the goodly art of play-writing never come into existence. In a country like England, in which there was so long established a dramatic tradition, it was impossible that the authors of a new form of imaginative effort should not feel the influence of the old. To the novel the drama left many obvious legacies, among others a belief in the importance of action, in the necessity of discriminated characters and striking situations. In the sphere of character, so early as the time of Richardson, the novel had left the drama behind, and though it could not be hoped that in the sphere of action the newer form would maintain its ground, it was clear that even there it would ultimately learn something from the old rival it has now gone so far to displace. What is surprising, since great artists are in general not only familiar with the resources of

their medium, but in the habit of stretching them to the utmost, is that up to Scott's day the modern novel should have borrowed so little. For a long time it went its leisurely course; if it had a dramatic story, spinning it out, as in 'Clarissa,' with interminable detail; and if it had not, as in 'Pamela,' 'Humphry Clinker,' or 'Evelina,' allowing the story to go as it pleased, provided the characters were displayed. With Scott it was no longer so; in his hands the novel does everything, now as in 'The Bride of Lammermoor' joining issue with the drama in a whole book, now as in 'Old Mortality' abounding in dramatic situations, and now as in 'The Antiquary,' true to its original habit, studying character with a leisured observation. Here indeed it did not need the testimony of Scott to prove that the supremacy of the novel was incontestable. The attentive reader of Fielding must have been quite prepared to acknowledge that the nicely distinguished shades of feeling, the varying though similar emotions which go to make up Oldbuck's character, could not have been so minutely and consequently could not have been so clearly emphasized by any dramatist writing for the purpose of representation. The

heart of such people the dramatist may seize, but their detail must of necessity escape him. Yet it is not perhaps in this department, where the supremacy of the novel is unquestioned, and where Scott has given instance after instance of its capacity, that he shows most conclusively his mastery over the resources of his medium. Rather is it in those departments which more particularly belong to the drama, in which the novel is not pre-eminent and can achieve at best but a secondary success. The success of the *Waverley Novels*, where success had long before been won, however remarkable for its magnitude, was only additional proof of the known capacities of the novel; their constant success in departments into which the novel had rarely ventured, or had ventured only to fail, was undoubtedly proof of a new capacity, and proof of such a kind as gravely to influence the subsequent course of imaginative literature. In the *Waverley Novels*, and for this alone they are a landmark in the history of English Literature, the province of the drama was seriously invaded. In them, the novel proved itself to be capable of dealing, not perfectly, yet excellently well, with dramatic situations, with those actions of which it had

long been thought it was the peculiar province of the drama to speak. It was natural that Scott's success, his demonstration of the various resources of his medium, should have led attention away from the drama and directed it to the novel, and even those who question the gain of the result,—the preponderating influence on imaginative literature which the novel now exerts—must confess their surprise at what in his hands it was made to do.

To open many of his novels is to see on the first page how much the older imaginative form had taught him. Novelists for the most part formerly were content to work their way gradually into their story. The first book of 'Tom Jones' is described as containing "as much of the birth of the foundling as is necessary or proper to acquaint the reader with in the beginning of this history": the first chapter as "the Introduction to the work or Bill of Fare to the feast": and the second chapter as "A short description of Squire Allworthy, and a fuller account of Miss Bridget Allworthy his sister." There was no reason why the tale should have begun otherwise. An author who sets out to tell his story in narrative form, has ample time

to make his effects; he is not bound as a dramatist is bound to catch the fancy of his audience at once, he is under no artistic compulsion to open with an effective situation, and consequently, since it is always difficult to plunge *in medias res*, or having plunged to return, he was generally content not to do so. But many of Scott's openings are effective in the extreme; even in 'The Antiquary,' where, if we leave the story of Lord Glenallan out of account, there is little to show the influence of the drama, the opening is far more effective than was common with his predecessors. With the meeting of two apparently chance acquaintances many a comedy has been introduced to the stage. Even more dramatic is the opening of 'Old Mortality'; by the time Morton has won the prize of the popinjay our interests are enlisted in his favour, and the story continues as it has begun, hurrying us along through a series of dramatic incidents till the hero arrives at his uncle's house.

Though it may be said that 'Old Mortality' begins with a truly dramatic excellence, the same cannot be pretended if we date the beginning from the actual introduction, which, while distinguished by conformity with the title, has

no other connection with the novel. In his other books Scott has many of those introductions, in which he plays round the actual business of commencing with all the prolixity of an older school. The whole business of Jedediah Cleishbotham and Dr. Dryasdust was part of the machinery of the man. These puppets caught his fancy on its peculiar side: they were to him what a doll is to a child, or a child to an octogenarian, and of what in reality was but a simple jest he never seems to have tired. It requires, however, so I think one must confess, an abnormal perception of humour to be always as delighted with those playful excursions as Scott evidently always was. A joke that is not particularly subtle, that depends on the subterfuge of saying that the author did not write the book, but that it was taken down by some chance acquaintance of my landlord, my school-master, or my antiquary, exhausts its possibilities in less than a hundred pages, or a dozen repetitions. We may consider it, if we choose, as the mere getting under weigh, the traditional apology of "the veracious chronicler," but it differs from the initial detail of Defoe or Fielding in the fact that it never deceives. At times it has so little

ingenuity that it even irritates. The artist, who prefaces 'The Bride of Lammermoor' with pleasant chat about a sign-painter, appears to be lacking in dignity. But Scott, even when writing without any serviceable purpose, could not write for long without throwing out something of excellence, and if Jedediah Cleishbotham and Mr. Pattieson had given us nothing else than the picture of Old Mortality, they would have done quite enough to excuse their rather cumbersome gambols. The reader stumbles through a few halting pages, to find suddenly—such curious corners had the mind of this wonderful man—a passage short indeed, but of such merit as to catch the fancy of succeeding generations. In a paragraph or two Scott paints a portrait which has led tourists in Edinburgh to visit a grave, and the inhabitants of Dumfries to erect a monument.

"As I approached," Mr. Pattieson writes, "I was agreeably undeceived. An old man was seated upon the monument of the slaughtered Presbyterians, and busily employed in deepening, with his chisel, the letters of the inscription, which, announcing, in scriptural language, the promised blessings of futurity to be the lot of the slain, anathematized the murderers with corresponding violence. A blue bonnet of unusual dimensions covered the grey hairs of the pious

strong
gull
some
upon
with

workman. His dress was a large old-fashioned coat of the coarse cloth called hoddin-grey, usually worn by the elder peasants, with waistcoat and breeches of the same; and the whole suit, though still in decent repair, had obviously seen a train of long service. Strong clouted shoes, studded with hobnails, and *gramoches* or *leggings*, made of thick black cloth, completed his equipment. Beside him fed among the graves a pony, the companion of his journey, whose extreme whiteness, as well as its projecting bones and hollow eyes, indicated its antiquity. It was harnessed in the most simple manner, with a pair of branks, a hair tether, or halter, and a *sunk*, or cushion of straw, instead of bridle and saddle. A canvas pouch hung around the neck of the animal, for the purpose, probably, of containing the rider's tools, and anything else he might have occasion to carry with him. Although I had never seen the old man before, yet from the singularity of his employment, and the style of his equipage, I had no difficulty in recognizing a religious itinerant whom I had often heard talked of, and who was known in various parts of Scotland by the title of Old Mortality."

The critic who proposes to remark on the novel which is prefaced by the description of this personage is met at the outset by a discussion of historical interest. Happily, since for a task of this kind, literary critics are seldom competent, it is possible to avoid the issue. That novels dealing with the past must necessarily be open to the praise or objections of historians may at once be conceded, as also that there will always

be those who will consider strict historical accuracy of vital importance. Yet for those who allow that a legitimate distinction may be drawn between a production which is primarily a historical novel, and a production which is not so much an attempt to reanimate history or to revivify a reign, as a work of imagination developed on a historical background, the merits of 'Old Mortality' will appear somewhat independent of the truth about the Covenanters. In such a book as 'Quentin Durward,' which derives most of its interest from the figure of Louis, there is an obligation not to be false to the spirit of the facts. In 'Old Mortality,' much more openly a work of the imagination, the obligation is more lightly felt. Even from a historical novel it is possible in this respect to ask too much. An author is not bound to satisfy unreasonable expectations. Yet one can imagine a reader of 'Quentin Durward' expecting that the picture of Louis should be drawn with literal accuracy, at the same time that one acknowledges that it is only the most naïve who have no suspicion in reading 'Old Mortality' that the author may occasionally have been tempted to make his moving mob of enthusiasts more

picturesque than was warranted by the facts. If then Scott in 'Old Mortality' has dashed in the background of his tale in more vivid colours — than the historian will approve, we have no cause to quarrel with him on that account, and if not, if he has given us a picture of literal accuracy, he has given us more than in 'Old Mortality' we had a right to expect. Of course, had he given us, instead of a picture of the Covenanters, who take up so large a space in his book, a mere caricature of them, the case would be different, but I do not think this has ever been pretended, and if in the body of the novel excessive weight is laid on their extravagances, ample amends are made at the close when Macbriar is condemned by the Council in the presence of Morton and Claverhouse. And here Scott's excellence is not merely that he puts into the mouth of his sombre fanatic a speech glowing with rare devotion to principle, but that he brings Morton and Claverhouse forward to give their differing testimony.

"The Council broke up, and Morton found himself again in the carriage with General Grahame.

"'Marvellous firmness and gallantry!' said Morton, as he reflected upon Macbriar's conduct; 'what a pity it is

that with such self-devotion and heroism should have been mingled the fiercer features of his sect !’

“‘You mean,’ said Claverhouse, ‘his resolution to condemn you to death?—To that he would have reconciled himself by a single text; for example, ‘And Phinehas arose and executed judgment,’ or something to the same purpose.—But wot ye where you are now bound, Mr. Morton?’”

By this happy juxtaposition of opinion the author supplies his own comment. He knew well that however he represented the Covenanters, criticisms as divergent would continue to be passed, and that the judgment of history was not likely to be gravely affected by the picture drawn of them in a work which pretended not to the dignity of fact.

The novel which goes by the title of ‘Old Mortality’ may or may not be Scott’s masterpiece, but on the whole it is perhaps the one, which, if a plebiscite of literary opinion were taken, would obtain the largest following. As a novelist he has three separate claims to distinction : he can afford to be judged as a novelist of character, as a dramatic novelist, and as a historical novelist. In the first capacity he has left such a book as ‘The Antiquary,’ in the second ‘The Bride of Lammermoor,’ and in the

third a number of productions such as 'Kenilworth,' and 'Ivanhoe,' among which it is difficult to make a selection. But in 'Old Mortality' he puts forward all three claims at once: as a novel of character the book may not be so great as 'The Antiquary'; possibly as a dramatic novel it does not compete with 'The Bride of Lammermoor,' and as a historical novel it may be less effective than others its author has left. But as a novel of character it has great claims, as a historical novel it has great claims, and it abounds in dramatic situations. In whatever aspect we choose to regard Scott, whether as a historical novelist, a dramatic novelist, or a novelist of character, we shall find something in 'Old Mortality' to satisfy expectation, and this is no doubt the reason, and it absolves criticism from the fruitless task of comparison, why so many are found according it the first place among his productions.

The mere story is exceedingly interesting, and unlike that of 'The Antiquary,' all of a piece. Everything is conducted in the same world of virile events and great actions, nor is there any attempt, as in so many of the Waverley Novels, to make facts propitious for virtuous and un-

propitious for selfish people. From a high moral standard—though on such a point hesitation is becoming—the character of Mause is superior to that of Cuddie, yet Mause is always falling into misfortune, and the mirth-provoking Cuddie on his feet. It will be said that it is the better part of Cuddie, his loyalty and good-nature, that leads him to preferment; but had Mause been silent, the selfish prudence of her son would have kept him from any of those dangers in which his better part has its opportunity. All this is in correspondence with life; in the story not only is there nothing improbable, but there is much that happens every day. Things fall out unevenly—Bothwell attracts the attention of his companions less for his courage than for the half-credited story of his birth. Morton refuses to tell an extremely obvious and convenient lie, and immediately his troubles begin. Evandale by his intercession saves Morton, and as a consequence ultimately loses his betrothed and his life. Morton forfeits his influence among the Covenanters because he has more wisdom than those around him; and Balfour owes as much of his power to the fact that he is supposed to have fought with the devil, and is

reali
due to

enthusiast enough to believe it, as to his proved sagacity and strength. On the other hand, Mrs. Wilson receives the reward of her faithful service, Morton of his valour, Edith—for love chooses his own rewards—of her constancy, and Jenny of her prudence. Altogether it is the world we live in, a basketful sufficiently surprising both to short-sighted traders and trading moralists, in which not all the good fruit is at the top and not all the bad at the bottom. The book is crowded with men and women, with troopers and Covenanters, with characters as diverse as old Morton and young Morton, Cuddie and Macbriar, Jenny and old Lady Margaret, Edith, Mrs. Wilson, and Mause; it is an epitome in a few hundred pages of Scott's world, not a fragment, but a miniature containing something of almost everything that appears on the big bustling stage of the Waverley Novels. If it be urged that Scott is not generally strong in female character, the reader of 'Old Mortality' may point in reply to four absolutely individual women; and even Edith, though she may not have as strongly marked an individuality as the rest, has a personality made sufficiently vivid by the force of contrast. Among his hundred men

of action there can hardly be two more opposite, and yet more life-like than Claverhouse and his — most distinguished opponent.

It is true that for all this width of treatment and observation we are not taken into any peculiarly dark corners; we are in a world of action, of open air, but then this was the world to which Scott's readers were accustomed, and with which the increasing class of novel readers is still chiefly familiar; for the countryman, the trader, the member of a profession, for all those who are not thrown into the unnatural surroundings of ignorance and want it must continue the normal world. For such people, unless the impulse of charity carry them far from "the even tenor of their way," acquaintance with the darkest corners of life must be only occasional. To those who walk the middle paths, the gravest troubles are, as a rule, made apparent by the aid of the poetical imagination in such books as 'Clarissa Harlowe,' 'The Duchess of Malfi,' or 'The Bride of Lammermoor,' each of which steps beyond the ordinary sphere. It is only to the poor and wretched that violent excess and irretrievable disaster are familiar com-panions, and in the beginning of this century

the poor and the wretched took up but a small portion of the thoughts of the general public. The world to which Scott introduces us in 'Old Mortality' is as wide as it was then convenient for an author who wished sympathetic readers, to deal with. Within its limits it is a singularly accurate reflection of actual affairs; we have a play of light and shade, but neither of the brightest light nor the darkest shadow. It was on this sober, active, and immensely real stage that Scott found himself most at home, contentedly inhabiting, as it were, a middle space between poetry and prose. For the world of 'Old Mortality' is no more, like that in which the main business of 'The Antiquary' is conducted, a world of mere prose, than it is the world of the dramatist. Scott, real as was his fondness for great actions, clung tenaciously to the simpler incidents of life, and in 'Old Mortality' battles and sieges jostle with familiar events, touches of deep feeling alternate with matter-of-fact detail. As a story-teller 'Old Mortality' shows him at the top of his power, and a whole stock of laudatory adjectives might be expended on the construction of the novel.

If faults are to be sought for, what is evident

may be said, that the catastrophe itself—the appearance of Morton at Edith's window, and her belief that she has seen a ghost—is more theatrical, on a lower plane of imagination than the rest, and has too little to do with the story which it concludes. It is merely an incident; we have no notion it is coming, and when it has come are perhaps more surprised than pleased. The end of 'Old Mortality,' unlike many of the other events, has nothing inevitable about it, the characters do not even slip towards it; the story hangs in the clouds till an expedient is devised by which Evandale may be got rid of, and Edith married to Morton. If Morton was to be brought back—and the story might well have ended with his dismissal into space—some more time should have been spent in giving importance to his return. Few stories are improved by being lengthened; but one would not easily have tired of 'Old Mortality,' nor found cause to regret that the volume had not been closed with a snap. A more serious criticism is that which urges that the importance of the incidents throughout is too great for the characters, and tends to distract the attention from the fortunes of Morton and Edith. But such value as this

can't
need
when
E & M
imp
s

criticism has is practical rather than theoretical. It is difficult to say abstractly what incidents are too large to be used for the purpose of elucidating character, and if the effect in 'Old Mortality' is as stated, it is a fault not so much in the story as in its management. The true answer to the criticism is that for every place where the interest of the events draws our attention away from the characters, there is another where the events derive their interest from their effect on the persons concerned, and that so far is the stricture from being justified, that it is impossible to overrate the skill with which the narrative contrives to give a personal interest even to occurrences of national importance. The hero and heroine were never to Scott the exclusive points of attraction; with him they were but two in the group of human beings to be depicted.

Considered in this light, and without special reference to Morton and Edith, the story of 'Old Mortality' is in every way admirable. In itself it is interesting, and, where it is not spun by the characters, influences them in its course. Properly speaking, there are two classes of incidents—those mainly of private and those

mainly of public interest. What is chiefly remarkable about the first, is their number and variety: the meeting of Bothwell and Balfour in the inn parlour; the night ride of Balfour and Morton, and the warning of the figure at the cross-roads; the discovery of Balfour in the loft in one of his visionary moods, when Sharpe's murder still occupies his thoughts; the surprise of the family at dinner in old Morton's house; the interview between Edith and Morton in the dungeon; Guse Gibbie's errand; the scene where Morton appears before Claverhouse; the trial of Macbriar; Morton's descent upon Jenny in her married state, with the exquisitely humorous conversation that ensues between her and her husband; and Morton's final interview with Balfour. Here surely—and the list could easily be extended—is a prodigal luxury of events. Scene succeeds scene, each as finely conceived as the next, each striking out from the persons implicated some leading trait of character, and most of them springing naturally from the circumstances and dispositions with which the reader is already familiar.

Of the other series of incidents, those of public concern, it is necessary to speak more at length.

They are not so numerous. Scott's object in writing 'Old Mortality' was not primarily to write history, and had he followed the career of Claverhouse, or Morton through the foreign wars in which he was engaged, he would at least have run the hazard of drowning the personal interest of the book. 'Old Mortality' would not have been what it is, it would have given us the figure of Claverhouse as 'Quentin Durward' gives us the figure of Louis. As things stand there are only three incidents of public rather than private concern—the affair at Drumclog, the siege of Tillietudlem, and the battle of Bothwell Bridge. It will be of interest to consider them from two points of view. Judged as mere battle-pieces, they are sufficiently admirable to challenge comparison with Scott's poetical work in this field, but admirable as they are they suffer from the comparison. A battle narrated in verse must always be capable of achieving higher artistic success than a battle narrated in prose, partly because the sound and tramp of the metre is better fitted to express the hurry and fever of war, but chiefly because verse is the natural medium in which to give utterance to sentiments excited to enthusiasm, and to de-

scribe events, the mere description of which stirs the blood. It would therefore be unreasonable to expect that the battle-piece in 'Old Mortality' should affect us quite in the same way as the account in 'Marmion' of the battle of Flodden. Judged, however, as the central incidents in a novel, they immediately acquire a new interest. One sees the art with which Scott has prevented his prose description of the movements of battalions becoming tedious by reliance on the personal element, as also how in the same way he has bent his difficult material into conformity with the purposes of his story. Marmion, though he plays some part in the battle of Flodden, is not the centre of interest, for the sufficient reason that there the poet felt he could rely with safety on the poetical glory with which he had invested war, on the rapid movement of his verse, on his vivid imitation of the clash and clang of battle. At Drumclog and Bothwell, Scott's medium being prose, it was not possible to do this, nor even, since he was occupied with a novel, desirable, and consequently there he calls our attention particularly to the very persons in whom at the time we are most interested; at Drumclog, to Claverhouse, since our

minds are still full of him, to the fate of the boy Grahame, interesting not only for his intrepidity, but for the almost paternal solicitude of his leader, and to Evandale, who, a few pages earlier, has won our affections by his chivalrous interposition in favour of his rival—and at Bothwell to Morton, and to Morton as a leader of resource and prudence. The interest of Drumclog is centred on Claverhouse, and serves to emphasize the human nature of the man whom, just before, we had seen judging like a Draco. The battle of Bothwell is lost, we are given to understand, because the Covenanters will not listen to those counsels of Morton which, by the time of the first onset, we have come to consider as the essence of political wisdom. The siege of Tillietudlem would not be what it is, were it not for the contrasted interests of Jenny and Cuddie, of Edith and her lover, and for the soldierly and avuncular figure of Major Bellenden.

If it be denied that Scott was a great artist, it will also be conceded that on such occasions the genius of his art speaks in him. To use incidents so large without sacrificing their scenic effect for the purpose of bringing into promi-

nence the humanity of a severe soldier, the political sagacity of a youth with the nature of a student, the simplicity of a ploughman, is indeed to arrive somewhere near that perfection of which Petrarch, speaking of one of Giotto's pictures, said, *ignorantes non intelligunt, magistri autem artis stupent*, that perfection which, though not understood by the multitude, fills the masters of the art with delight and despair. And what is true of Scott here where there was most difficulty is true of him throughout the book. 'Old Mortality' is not a tale, like so many told since its appearance, of puppets who pass through an infinite series of adventures, and in whom our only interest is whether they will pass through them or not, an interpretation of the business of fictitious composition which though new is still surprising. While relying on the exciting nature of his incidents, Scott continually gives evidence that he does not rely on them alone. We are interested in Morton before he saves Balfour, in Cuddie and Mause before they are taken prisoners, and in Macbriar before he is brought to the council. Everywhere the incidents are helped by the characters, and the characters by the incidents.

It is obvious that these are merits of a suffi-

ciently striking description, and easy to say, in our first enthusiasm about them, that without a story constructed somewhat after this manner, it would be impossible for a novel to attain enduring success. Easy to say but hard to prove, for if it is required to show that a novel can do very well with a narrative in one particular entirely different, one has but to point to 'Rob Roy.' There, certain as it is that the incidents bring out in the most artful manner the dispositions of the characters, the characters have hardly any effect on the plot. 'Rob Roy' may be broadly distinguished from 'Old Mortality' by the fact that in it the narrative is of the most arbitrary kind. The reader is placed in the curious position of becoming more or less intimately acquainted with a set of people, about whose future actions he can predict nothing, and who, while comporting themselves as if they were

"no other than a moving row
Of Magic Shadow-shapes that come and go,"

give everywhere proof of their real humanity.

With this signal exception, and allowing for the circumstance that 'Rob Roy' is in every sense a lighter production than 'Old Mortality,'

there are many points in common between the two books. Like 'Old Mortality,' 'Rob Roy' is a novel of character set in a historical period, and though leaning much less on history, also introducing historical characters as agents in the plot. In neither novel are hero or heroine historical and in both, while the main narrative is entirely imaginary, history is relied on to furnish the middle portion. Both stories are interesting, but Scott appears to have wearied of both, and to have finished one as hurriedly as the other. A few differences of detail serve but to emphasize the likeness, for though in dealing with the Covenanters we come freely in contact with actual facts, and in dealing with the freebooters we do not, the whole excursus on Rob Roy and his band is nothing more than a paraphrase of history. Again, though Morton's fortunes are far more intimately associated with those of Balfour, than Francis Osbaldistone's with Rob Roy's, a turn in the adventures of the respective heroes is the means of our becoming intimately acquainted with both outlaws. Far more care is expended in 'Rob Roy' than in 'Old Mortality' on the character of the heroine, so much indeed that it is one of the few novels of Scott, set in

Scotch surroundings, which does not depend to some extent on his unusual power of depicting the humours of waiting-maids or peasant women; against this we have to remember that far more care is expended in 'Old Mortality' than in 'Rob Roy' on the character of the young hero. 'Old Mortality' is the more serious, and perhaps when everything is considered the greater work; the excellences of 'Rob Roy' are not of so grave a kind, but perhaps of the two works it is the more delightful. In both there is a variety of moving situations and interesting and life-like characters.

We appear to arrive at the conclusion that we may have two novels of a somewhat similar excellence and both admirable, even though analysis reveals that the plot of one is natural and the plot of the other absurd. If it is so it will go some way to demonstrate the essential difference between the requirements of the novel and those of the drama. If an investigation of the plot of 'Rob Roy' shows that to a novel it is a matter of comparative unimportance to have a reasonable or connected story, provided only that it is such as to sustain the interest of the reader, and to give opportunity to the characters,

something will have been done to prove that a novelist who understands his business will regard action not as an end in itself, but chiefly so far as it reflects upon disposition and manner.

'Rob Roy,' it will not be denied, has in a high degree both given pleasure and excited interest, but though the slipshod story is eminently characteristic of Scott, and each of its parts in others of the Waverley Novels might find its parallel, it would be difficult, in the whole range of them, to match it exactly. Francis Osbaldistone, the son of a wealthy merchant in London, descended from an old Northumbrian family, is seduced by the promptings of a romantic spirit from the plain paths of mercantile prosperity. His father, disgusted with his son's disinclination for business pursuits, abandons the idea of adopting him as a partner, and sends an emissary to the north to discover which of his nephews would be best fitted to fill the vacant place. Meanwhile before everything is ready for the reception of the favoured nephew in London, not knowing, I suppose, what to do with his recalcitrant son, he dispatches him on a visit to his uncle, Sir Hildebrand, at Osbaldistone Hall. Throughout the book, the reader is kept in the

dark about many circumstances calculated to excite curiosity, and it is in consonance with the rest that no explanation should be offered of this whim of the merchant's. One thing only is certain, that Francis did not go to the north to do business already done, or to make arrangements for his successor. It is of the less consequence, as the fancy is productive of so many entrancing adventures, that we soon forget its apparent purposelessness.

On his way to Osbaldistone Hall, Francis falls in with a certain Mr. Morris, the secret messenger of business of State, and later on in the same day at a wayside inn with Mr. Robert Campbell, for under that name the notorious Rob Roy, while travelling in England, chose to disguise his identity. The traveller then arrives at his uncle's house, and makes the acquaintance of the remarkable family group assembled there—old Sir Hildebrand himself, his ward Diana Vernon, and the six sons of Sir Hildebrand as described in Diana's entertaining catalogue, Percie the sot, Thornie the bully, John the gamekeeper, Dickon the jockey, Wilfred the fool, and Rashleigh the scholar, who is also the lover and persecutor of Diana, the Jacobite agent, and general villain

of the piece. The next incident of importance is that Morris the traveller, having been robbed while in company with Campbell by two disguised men, one of whom addressed the other as Osbaldistone, lays an information against his quondam companion Francis. While Francis is being examined by the magistrate, Campbell appears, and Morris, apparently intimidated by what he says to him, agrees to drop the prosecution. Diana, having insisted upon accompanying Francis to the magistrate's house, and there meeting Rashleigh, ample scope is given for the display of all the characters concerned. Nevertheless the reader is puzzled. Why, he asks himself, is Francis accused, and why is the prosecution abandoned? Later on, he is told that Rashleigh, to divert suspicion from himself, the real culprit, had induced Morris to charge his cousin, and had only desisted from his purpose because Diana, she being deep in the councils of the Jacobites, had taken upon herself the championship of the accused. But this explanation is insufficient for the facts, since it supposes that suspicion was likely to rest on Rashleigh; but if that had been so, it was likely so to fall out when the charge against his cousin

was dropped, and of this there is no hint; and since it also supposes that Morris either was an agent of Rashleigh¹ or Rob Roy, or at least sufficiently in the latter's power to fear him. On the first supposition there was no chance of his proceeding against Rashleigh, and thus working against the interests of his secret employer. On the second he could as easily have been terrified into remaining quiet altogether, as into abandoning the prosecution he had commenced. The only sufficient explanation for the accidental conduct of Rashleigh and Morris, would have been that Rashleigh had a spite against his cousin. But from this Scott was precluded since he had introduced this incident in his haste, before he had invented a cause of quarrel between them. The episode is faultily managed, since the reader justly expects that an incident of such a kind, brought in with so much effort, will have some bearing on the plot. He reads on expecting some consequence to arise from it, till in the rush of new adventures, he has forgotten what he expected.

¹ At the end of his career, if his dying speech can be trusted, Morris appears to have been acting as an agent of Rashleigh.

After this interesting affair the story proceeds as if it had never happened. Francis, still more enamoured of Diana, and having his curiosity piqued by some remarks she lets fall, questions Rashleigh about her. He elicits the following facts. Miss Vernon has before her the alternative of becoming a nun, or the wife of one of Sir Hildebrand's sons. It appears that she had originally been dedicated to the cloister, but that to fulfil a family contract, a dispensation had been procured from Rome, enabling her, if she preferred, to marry—Osbaldistone, Esq., son of Sir Hildebrand Osbaldistone of Osbaldistone Hall; and it appears further that she could not, one must suppose, conformably to her duty as a strict Catholic, marry any one else. In addition to this information, Rashleigh hints that there is nothing improbable in the contingency of Miss Vernon's marrying him. So disturbed is Francis at this news that he behaves rudely to Diana at dinner, takes refuge from his self-mortification in repeated libations, and becoming irresponsible, enters into a noisy altercation with Rashleigh, which he ends by striking him in the face, an insult, we are given to understand, never forgiven.

Introduced where it is, this quarrel as far as it affects the relations of Rashleigh and Francis is of little or no use to the plot. Whenever afterwards Rashleigh crosses the path of the hero, his actions, as far as they are explicable, are sufficiently explained by motives of self-interest. On the fortunes of the heroine it has an immediate effect, since she having insisted on an explanation from Francis, their first intimate interview takes place. From this colloquy the reader also profits, gathering something of the sinister influence which Rashleigh exercises over the household.

Things then take a quieter turn, but Francis soon finds a new cause for disturbance, from observing two shadows against the blind of the sitting-room which Diana inhabits. Rashleigh having gone some time before to London, it is only left to young Osbaldistone to suppose that his mistress is in communication with some favoured lover. Tormented with jealous suspicions, he finally determines to enter the room unannounced, and make discovery for himself. When he does so, he finds Diana alone, but a tell-tale glove lying on the table. A second intimate interview takes place, in which Diana admits that she has had a visitor, but refuses to

give any further information. While Francis is still agitated by this avowal, she puts into his hands a letter directed to him, and on which the major part of the plot is made to hang. The letter is from his father's partner, and acquaints him that Rashleigh has betrayed his trust, and, during the absence of Mr. Osbaldistone in Holland, absconded with a number of papers of great value belonging to the firm. Many of these papers were promises to pay issued by respectable houses in Glasgow, and sent on to Messrs. Osbaldistone and Tresham, as security, and curiously enough (Osbaldistone and Tresham must have been fond of this mode of investment), representing almost the whole available assets of the firm. The head clerk, the letter continues, is already in Glasgow, for the purpose of preventing the payment of the bills, and Francis is urged to repair thither as soon as possible. Diana then retires, and shortly after returns with a sealed letter in a blank envelope, on which, she says, in the last resort he may rely, but which he is not to open till ten days before the date fixed in Mr. Tresham's communication, as that on which the credit of the firm will expire. What is found out later

may be added here, that Rashleigh's object in all this was to render the house of Osbaldistone and Tresham bankrupt, not from any ill-will to them, but in order to embarrass various Jacobite Highland lairds who possessed promises to pay of theirs, which, if the great firm became bankrupt, would of course be so much waste-paper. At first Rashleigh's action looks merely spiteful, but Scott afterwards is at pains to set the reader right on this point. Nothing, he assures him, could well have been more reasonable. Rashleigh, a Jacobite agent, was merely, in the ordinary way of Jacobites, promoting the Jacobite cause. The Highland lairds, impoverished or ruined by the failure of their bank, and thus having the less to lose, would be the more willing to draw the sword in favour of the king over the water. It was no more than an ingenious and novel attempt to promote the fortunes of revolutionaries by draining their exchequer.¹ As to the meaning of

¹ An amusing commentary on this is that Scott tells us, near the end of the book, that Rashleigh had been forced to render up his spoils "by the united authority of Sir Frederick Vernon and the Scottish chiefs." One would not have suspected that the authority of the Scottish chiefs would have weighed with Rashleigh, as at the time

Diana's action there is no such pleasing certainty. The letter, we subsequently discover, was addressed to Rob Roy, and probably, though we have to find this out for ourselves, contained an order to him to obtain the papers if he did not possess them already, and hand them back to Francis. That Diana should conceal from Francis the contents of a Jacobite letter was a caution which explains itself. The reason for the mystery of the address is less obvious. In any case it was a secret that could not long be preserved, nor will the supposition that she meant her lover to rely on his own efforts first, serve as a full explanation, for by the time he had reached Glasgow, the scene of operations, he was free, in obedience to her instructions, to open the concealing envelope. However, when an author is writing off the reel he is not altogether to be blamed for refusing to be explicit.

Possessed of this document, Francis sets off immediately for Glasgow, and once arrived there the adventures become so fast and im-

he took the papers he must have contemplated their anger.

probable, that if criticism were to attempt to discuss them, tedium would be outdone. On his arrival he goes to church, and receives a mysterious message to meet a stranger on Glasgow bridge at midnight. He obeys and meets the stranger, who, preserving his incognito, and ways of mystery, leads him at length to the door of a prison; Francis excusably insists upon an explanation, but Rob Roy still maintaining a needless caution, he waives his scruples, and consents to be conducted to a cell where he finds his father's trusted clerk Owen. Owen, on making his appearance at one of the offices of his employers' correspondents in Glasgow, had opened the case to them to warn them against paying any bills which Rashleigh might present, but these merchants discovering on reference to their books that the London firm was more in their debt than they in its, determined to commit Owen, but a nominal shareholder, to prison for debt, as if that would be likely to improve their position, and as if they were not far more interested in any efforts to secure the solvency of Osbaldistone and Tresham than Owen himself was. Francis is much alarmed, and none of them can see a way out of the difficulty, when

Bailie Nicol Jarvie, a kinsman of Rob Roy's and a trusted correspondent of Osbaldistone and Tresham's, appears, and soon relieves the situation. He agrees to procure Owen's release, and to overlook the presence of Rob Roy, whom he readily recognizes. Meanwhile, the fated time having come, Francis opens Diana's envelope, and the enclosure is delivered to Rob Roy, who forthwith invites them to meet him at the Clachan of Aberfoyle. One's first impression is that Rob Roy's object in this invitation was the appointment of a meeting-place where he might safely hand over the papers after securing them from Rashleigh. But first impressions are not to be trusted. Next day Francis meets Rashleigh on Glasgow Green, there has a duel with him, and is only prevented from giving him his dispatch by the timely intervention of Rob Roy, who is presumably interested in the preservation of so active a Jacobite. It is obvious therefore that Rashleigh had not the immediate custody of the papers, else there was nothing to prevent their being handed over to Francis there and then. But also it is equally obvious that if Rob Roy ever came to know where they were concealed, he must either have had his

knowledge from Rashleigh, or have known on his own account where they were. And so for the further delay in their delivery, one is still as far as ever from understanding the reason. Granted that Rob Roy desired to conceal his part in the matter, granted that the papers were not in Glasgow, granted ever so many other conceivable things, it must still have been possible, if it is possible to think seriously on the subject at all, for the man who could pass two days in that city, unknown, to send a messenger with them, when they were procured, to Francis' lodging.

The next morning Francis sets out, still with no clue to their hiding-place, for the Clachan of Aberfoyle, and there, the moment he arrives, is surrounded with difficulties. The day after he is driven about from scrape to scrape till evening falls. He has not even the good fortune to speak to Rob Roy, but just at that hour when dusk melts into darkness, while wandering dejectedly by the banks of the Forth, he is overtaken by Diana and her father. It is now her business to hand him the precious bundle, she being, one might suppose—if one might suppose anything in regard to this tale—as much

surprised as he at the unexpected meeting. Where she procured these papers is an idle speculation. Rob Roy in the early part of that day had been betrayed, the latter part of it he had spent in custody. From him, then, if she got them at all, she must have got them the day before, when Francis was trudging from Glasgow to Aberfoyle, thus obtaining ample time to deposit them in safety before Francis met her riding with them into space, and if she did not get them from Rob Roy but from some agent of Rashleigh's further south, what was the object in dispatching her lover to the north that the papers might come tumbling after him? "The whole," as Hume says on a more serious occasion, "is a riddle, an aenigma, an inexplicable mystery." What is worth remarking, is that if Francis had not somehow been transported to Aberfoyle, we should have missed some of the most delightful scenes in the *Waverley Novels*, scenes which secure our interest, and paint for us with amazing skill the varieties of Highland character.

These scenes completed, we are no nearer the conclusion. Francis' father has got his papers, and is again a rich man, Diana's second lover

turns out to have been her Jacobite father in hiding, but before her there is still the alternative of marrying a son of Sir Hildebrand, or entering the cloister. The long-spun Highland episode has not brought the lovers an inch nearer the desired consummation. If Diana could contemplate marrying Francis now, she could have contemplated marrying him when he was at Osbaldistone Hall. Attentive to these difficulties, and determined to make amends for his past dilatoriness, Scott sets himself manfully to the business of sweeping away the chief obstacles. In a chapter or two he kills five of Sir Hildebrand's sons, afflicts Sir Hildebrand with a fatal illness, and makes Rashleigh turn traitor, so that he may be disinherited and Francis put in his place. Shortly afterwards Sir Hildebrand dies, and Francis Osbaldistone, now a man of property, takes up his residence at the seat of his ancestors. There he finds Diana and her father in hiding, but makes no progress in his suit. Rashleigh, who has become an agent of the Hanoverian Government, appears suddenly on the scene to arrest them all for high treason, only to be quickly followed by Rob Roy, who runs his sword through him, and thus disposes

of the possibility of the Pope's dispensation being regularly filled up. Sir Frederick Vernon and his daughter depart for the continent, Vernon being apparently too jealously fond of her to look with favour on her lover. But he too pays the penalty of interference with a masterful plot; he is not expected, we are told, to survive, for many months, a lingering disease. The Pope's dispensation is now the only remaining difficulty, but Scott is weary of difficulties. It all arranged itself somehow. "How I sped in my wooing, Will Tresham," says Francis Osbaldistone, "I need not tell you. You know too how long and happily I lived with Diana."

On the turns, surprises, and many absurdities of this story it is not necessary to remark; its very shortcomings are instructive, for though a play founded on 'Rob Roy,' and relying on the interest it has excited, may occasionally amuse an audience of novel readers, an original drama with such a plot would be fore-doomed to failure. The action, dramatically considered, is fatally faulty, everywhere the occurrences are accidental, and, till the end, leave the position of the leading actors unaltered. The same narrative in a novel

is open to the same criticism, but strangely enough it does not provoke it. Not one out of ten of the readers of 'Rob Roy' can ever have troubled himself with explaining its contradictions and improbabilities. The reason is fairly obvious. In a novel one thinks not of the plot but of the characters, and conundrums that would force themselves on the attention of an audience in a theatre, pass almost unnoticed by the readers of fictitious tales. It is not pretended that 'Rob Roy' does not to some extent suffer from whatever there is in it of the ridiculous. People are to be judged by their conduct, and even Diana is not a more life-like figure, because she descends more than once like a goddess from a creaking machine; what is plain is that 'Rob Roy' survives its story. Scott seizes on each situation as it occurs, and makes it so absorbing and delightful, that in watching the play of emotion we forget altogether to ask how the circumstances responsible for it managed to happen. Indeed his triumph with 'Rob Roy' is little short of marvellous. The narrative with its generally purposeless mystery was just such as would have suited Mrs. Radcliffe. How she would have expanded the character of the

shadowy Morris, with what dark colours she would have imbued Diana's secret assignments in the library, how the arras would have shaken, and with what delight would she have insisted on the awful alternative which lay before the heroine! But Scott is not the least disturbed by his melodramatic surroundings: he swings out into the open air; and sealed missives, mysterious meetings, and Jacobite intrigues do not prevent Diana from laughing, Andrew Fairservice from meddling, the Osbaldistones from hunting, or the sun from shining. The chief effect of the melodramatic plot, and in its way it is a sufficiently disastrous one, is the production of Rashleigh, a schemer of idle schemes, and much too obviously appointed to do any villainy that may need to be done.

With the exception of Rashleigh, as also with that of Sir Frederick Vernon, a faint Radcliffian figure, all the characters are real people. The whole colony at Osbaldistone Hall, Andrew Fairservice, Bailie Nicol Jarvie (though these two have more than a touch of a caricature one would not willingly exchange for reality), Dougal, and Rob Roy, all these are excellent pieces of character-painting, the chief of them

owing a great part of their excellence to the skill with which they are thrown into circumstances in which it is easy to get at their essence. Had Andrew Fairservice remained at Osbaldistone Hall, he would have been but a Scotch gardener; had Bailie Nicol Jarvie sat in his counting-house, he would have been but a Glasgow bailie; and even Rob Roy, had we not seen him walking about Northumberland in knee-breeches, would not have shown to the same advantage on his "native heath."

The character which at once rises most superior to its circumstances, and is best displayed by them, is that of Diana Vernon. She is in the thick of almost all of melodrama there is in the plot, and yet, though taking full advantage of each situation, she remains true to the friendly nickname of Heath-blossom which Justice Inglewood bestows on her. The first meeting between the lovers is conceived in the happiest vein. Diana appears in the hunting-field, in her element, the morning, moving with all the zest of youth, and enjoying, as only young blood can enjoy, the gaiety of motion. The course of the chase brings her across the path of Francis the traveller, who, drawing his rein, has, as he

tells us, "a full view of her uncommonly fine face and person, to which an inexpressible charm was added by the wild gaiety of the scene, and the romance of her singular dress and appearance." And no doubt it is this, the wild and romantic nature of the scenes in which she is found, that gives throughout the book such an inexpressible charm to the figure of Diana. The plain fact of her position, the only lady in Sir Hildebrand's household, and thus thrown perforce into close companionship with members of the opposite sex, has all the interest of novelty. To depict a hoyden, to give a boy a girl's name and desires, has never been difficult, but to depict a girl who has every temptation to become a hoyden, and who, while sufficiently alive to them to be induced to adopt a manner more frank than ordinary, yet remains characteristically feminine, is a matter of the utmost difficulty.

Diana, as long as she is in the open, and in company with her cousins, has grace indeed, still it is that kind of rollicking grace which alone was possible in the circumstances. To her, as Scott is at pains to convince us, this boyish rush of high spirits was not natural, but due

partly to the influence of her surroundings, and partly to her desire to escape, by participating in the ways of others, from herself. Consequently when she is alone with her lover, there is none of it, or only that capacity for it, which the strictest will allow to be consistent with maidenly modesty. The Diana who appears in the library has the same high-strung temperament as the Diana who appears in the hunting-field or in the hall of Inglewood's house; all that Scott takes from her is that exuberance of health which in moments of action has its natural play. Charming as Diana is on her first appearance, she becomes infinitely more charming when we discover that her gaiety is not merely the freedom of youth without a care, but the careless sallies of a spirit kept continually in a state of high tension. No doubt all really high-spirited people, all people whose spirits are sufficiently fervent to break out in a bewitching liveliness, are also capable of responding with vivacity to the deeper emotions, but to the imaginative artist there is no more complicated task than to show this, to touch delicately the shading on the surface, while revealing the depth of feeling beneath. As to how this may be done, it is no

part of the critic's business even to venture a suggestion. In his own way Scott achieves it, using for his purpose a series of contrasted incidents, and so admirably that the figure with which he presents us, compares for truth to nature with Thackeray's masterly portrait in 'Esmond.' Of the two women, Beatrix is the more dazzling, and her gaiety, since more feminine and less boisterous, even more attractive, but she is not more life-like. If Beatrix has had the whole world at her feet, Diana has had half the world at hers; nor must it be forgotten that if Scott here comes near Thackeray's excellence, he comes near it at the expenditure of far less trouble. Diana produces her effect more quickly than Beatrix, because wherever she appears she makes her effect. She is seen in a greater variety of situations: a few sharp strokes from the master, and a new characteristic of his sunny creation slips out in response to the altered scene. We first meet Diana in the flush of her youth, and at our first meeting with her, we see, conformably with Scott's custom with all his greater characters, nothing more than the outside. She appears next as the chivalrous friend of her unfriended

cousin, a transition with nothing of violence in it, as happy youth is prone, if it is prone to anything besides its own development, to generous impulses; then, when we feel we owe her a debt of gratitude, as justly indignant. Let those who doubt Scott's insight as an artist study that chapter of 'Rob Roy,' when Diana, who has called Francis to her to reproach him for his conduct, throws open, in her generous frankness, the troubled places of her mind, or that other chapter when, almost surprised of her secret, and with every excuse for anger at her lover's intrusive curiosity, she brings her quick wit to his aid. As commentaries on Diana's character, these scenes would have lost half their value had the way not been prepared for them. As it is, their contrast with those that have preceded is singularly impressive: we believe in Diana's seriousness because we believed in her mirth. Melodramatic perhaps both chapters are: let us prefer to consider what purposes the melodrama is made to serve. But Scott's real triumph is, when near the close of the book he shows us his heroine in an attitude of unexpected tenderness, unexpected when it comes, I mean, but coming with such force

that when it has come we are ready to declare that all along we had expected it. Diana, in company with her father, has overtaken Francis Osbaldistone on the road, and delivered the fateful packet.

“‘In the attitude,’ says her lover, ‘in which she bent from her horse, which was a Highland pony, her face, not perhaps altogether unwillingly, touched mine—she pressed my hand, while the tear that trembled in her eye found its way to my cheek instead of her own. It was a moment never to be forgotten—inexpressibly bitter, yet mixed with a sensation of pleasure so deeply soothing and affecting, as at once to unlock all the flood-gates of the heart. It was *but* a moment, however; for, instantly recovering from the feeling to which she had involuntarily given way, she intimated to her companion she was ready to attend him, and putting their horses to a brisk pace, they were soon far distant from the place where I stood.

“‘Heaven knows, it was not apathy which loaded my frame and my tongue so much, that I could neither return Miss Vernon’s half embrace, nor even answer her farewell. The word, though it rose to my tongue, seemed to choke in my throat like the fatal *guilty*, which the delinquent who makes it his plea knows must be followed by the doom of death. The surprise—the sorrow, almost stupefied me. I remained motionless with the packet in my hand, gazing after them, as if endeavouring to count the sparkles which flew from the horses’ hoofs. I continued to look after even these had ceased to be visible, and to listen for their footsteps long after the last distant trampling had died in my ears. At length, tears rushed to my eyes, glazed as they were by

the exertion of straining after what was no longer to be seen. I wiped them mechanically, and almost without being aware that they were flowing, but they came thicker and thicker. I felt the tightening of the throat and breast, the *hysterica passio* of poor Lear; and, sitting down by the wayside, I shed a flood of the first and most bitter tears which had flowed from my eyes since childhood.'"

It is perilously near nonsense, of course; Diana had no business to be galloping about by the side of the Forth, but what nonsense it is; was ever romance so delightful?

Of all Scott's numerous qualities this capacity for pure romance at the age of forty-five was not the least remarkable, for though great imaginative work has been done in age, it is seldom imaginative work of this sort. The imagination of a man of middle life, however active, is almost invariably serious; it is not, as the imaginative fancies of youth so often are, the mere play of the mind. With most responsible people the purely romantic vein, which takes delight in conceiving generously improbable actions, runs thin quite soon. It is remarkable then that in almost all Scott's novels there should be observable a strong vein of irresponsible romance, and that, if anything, it

should be most observable in his later productions. Even his novels of character are not free from it. In 'Rob Roy' it appears everywhere, in 'Guy Mannering' it supplies a motive to the novel, in 'The Antiquary,' where what is good is extremely staid, it runs riot in the story of Lord Glenallan, and 'The Heart of Midlothian' becomes at the end just such a tale as children tell to themselves to beguile the time away.

To preserve one's youth, said Mr. Arnold, is the secret of genius, and there is a freshness in these enthusiastic bursts of fancy of which we are apt to feel the fascination. But though where, as in 'Rob Roy,' they form part of the essence of a book, they are not to be taken too seriously; in other cases where, as in 'The Antiquary' or 'The Heart of Midlothian,' the romantic part is out of harmony with the rest, the consequent detriment to the novel is evident. 'The Antiquary' may be defined as a novel of character into which is foisted a tale of *diablerie*. To fit a definition to 'The Heart of Midlothian' is not so easy. Perhaps the most famous of Scott's works, it begins in one manner, continues in another, and ends in a third. If it is to be considered as a whole, and

certainly, if attention is to be directed to its excellence, it is, like 'The Antiquary,' a novel of character. All that is good in it, is of that kind of effort which an imaginative genius of mature years might be expected to find congenial. The odd thing is that, though appearing just two years before 'Ivanhoe,' what portion of it is historical is managed with less art than was usual with Scott, and that, though published in the same year as 'Rob Roy,' when it wanders into the region of romance, it fails. While one is at a loss to discover reasons for the first defect, the second is explicable enough. It was too late, when Scott thought of it, to turn 'The Heart of Midlothian' into a fairy tale, and though the sketches of Sir George and Lady Staunton are not above the capacity of very ordinary novelists, and the discovery of the long-lost heir in circumstances visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children is an incident as highly coloured as commonplace, it is probably true that no excellence could have saved this part of the book. Long before Effie appears as a leader of fashion we have come to accept the cow-feeder and his daughters as part of the natural order; we have become accustomed to

the distresses of birds of very ordinary plumage, and are in no humour to see them decked out in peacock's feathers. Jeanie Deans and her father in prosperity lose half their charm, nor is the matter mended with the attempt at a compromise between this flight of genial fancy and the essential tragedy of the story. One would not willingly decide that the result is a *dénouement* which is an error in taste, but it comes as near it as it was possible for Scott to come.

As to the beginning of the book, coming from whom it did, it is an enigma. In a superlative degree Scott had the art of combining the historical and fictitious occurrences in a narrative. To his success in this particular, 'Old Mortality' bears emphatic witness, and it would be simple to furnish the curious reader with a dozen other instances as strong, yet 'The Heart of Midlothian' begins with as plain a piece of history as has ever opened a novel. Had Scott been working here according to his usual method, the tale would have begun by introducing us to some of the chief characters and circumstances, and the narrative of the Porteous riots, as far as it concerned Robertson, Butler, and Effie, would

have been incorporated later. As it is, we have the history before we have reason to take interest in it, and when in the eighth chapter we come effectively in contact with the chief actors, we have to take a long step backward in time. I do not know whether this last defect in construction has weighed heavily with the readers of 'The Heart of Midlothian,' but what would be thought of a dramatist who began his second act at a period anterior to his first! A novel is not exacting in point of narrative, but some demands it must make. It may be reasonably asked of a novelist that whatever atmosphere he places us in, whether a sordid, a real, or a romantic one, that atmosphere should be preserved throughout. An equally modest request is that which asks that a fictitious tale should be fictitious, and such facts as are introduced subservient to the purpose of the story. It is not required of a novel that it should have a more reasonable narrative than 'Rob Roy,' any more than it is required that it should not narrate the battles of Drumclog or Bothwell Bridge, but the irreducible minimum of requirement is that it should neither end nor begin as 'The Heart of Midlothian' is begun and ended.

Between the beginning and ending, neither of which is artistically successful, is sandwiched the vital part of the book. But even here, where there is so much to praise, there is a difficulty in the way of unrestricted laudation. One of the most famous of novels, 'The Heart of Midlothian,' is also one of the most uncomfortable. Not only does a moral run through it, but we are asked to make the application. "Reader," says Scott at the end, with a manly disregard of the canons of his art, "this tale will not be told in vain, if it shall be found to illustrate the great truth, that guilt, though it may attain temporal splendour, can never confer real happiness; that the evil consequences of our crimes long survive their commission, and like the ghosts of the murdered, for ever haunt the steps of the malefactor: and that the paths of virtue, though seldom those of worldly greatness, are always those of pleasantness and peace." Alas for the austerity of morals that will not quite permit of such facility of illustration. The good man, say the philosophers from Plato to Paley, is happy, and the bad man miserable. We must believe, if we can, that the rule is without spiritual exceptions, but to give it a material application

is to put faith to a trial. Happy doubtless was Socrates quaffing his hemlock, unhappy, let us suppose it, Nero fiddling, but had Effie Deans been hanged, where would have been the peace of mind of her sister, and had Lady Staunton not found her son, what would have happened to dash the fashionable pleasures in which she and her husband took delight? In every great imaginative work, as wherever human beings are found, side lights will be thrown upon morals, but the moral insight we gain is derived, not from the conduct of events, but from a study of the dispositions of the characters. The fictitious story being entirely at the writer's mercy, nothing can be more idle than that he should refer to its authority.

But though thus the actual moral appended to 'The Heart of Midlothian,' like that which Coleridge plaintively subjoins to his delightful lines on the Raven, may be put aside, it is not possible to speak so lightly of the didactic teaching of the book. It is quite obvious, I think, that Scott meant, as he would probably have expressed it, "to kill two birds with a stone," or, in other language, to write a readable novel, and to promote the cause of abstract virtue. The

story will entertain, we may suppose him to have said, but its reader will have to accept my dogma that in no circumstances is it possible to permit of any deviation from the truth. There is a quaintness in this, of course, coming from the placid denier of the authorship of *The Waverley Novels* which it is difficult to miss, but that is an antique fallacy of argument, and Scott puts his proposition so seriously that it would be discourteous to avoid it. A novel of the moral problem order cannot reasonably be expected to press a point of accepted morality, since if it did it would be pardonably accused of being dull. There is nothing then to complain of in the fact that Scott's dogma will not fit with the practice of honest men. Laws are changed frequently in civilized communities because it is found that they have grown so out of consonance with an advancing moral sense that juries will rather perjure themselves daily than give effect to them. And perhaps it may be said that few articles of any modern church are altered, till the majority of its members have formed the habit of explaining them away. What is to be complained of is that '*The Heart of Midlothian*,' being a novel, should raise just the question it

does, on which, though most men are vaguely agreed, few care to formulate a definite opinion. How much simpler the world would be if such a thing as lying had never been invented it is needless to speculate. The business of courts of criminal justice would be reduced to putting one question and receiving one answer, and the labour of historians sensibly diminished. Still, the world being as it is, and the invention made, it has seemed and does seem that there are occasions in practice in which the immediate disaster brought about by stating the fact, outweighs the theoretical advantage. What Royalist in whose house the fugitive Charles had been concealed would have hesitated to answer a leading question in the negative? how different the impression made by Desdemona had she informed upon Othello. The poets, we may be sure, have not written variations on the phrase *splendide mendax* for nothing. With all this, however, these cases are so rare, and it is always so difficult to persuade men of the necessity of truth-speaking, that the weakness of human nature prefers not to contemplate them. Against this weakness, no doubt, it is the duty of ethical writers to wage war; it was the office of casuistry to test

the sweeping generalizations of morals, as it is the fancy of Ibsen to-day, by opposing one moral axiom to another, to arouse activity on ethical subjects. As moralists, and every one in so far as he is not an automaton is a moralist, we ought rather to welcome than to avoid such discussions; we ought even to welcome a discussion on this particular subject, on which, if on any, a man would desire to speak guardedly. But as novel readers we may fairly ask that we should not be given the alternative either of accepting offhand a generalization which we are unwilling to accept, or of giving offhand a denial to a proposition to which exception is only to be taken with caution. The interests of truth, especially in a modern world where other interests are losing their weight, every one has at heart, and since most men would, if they could, rather write an ethical treatise than be found tripping on such a subject, the novelist who demands an opinion from an arm-chair on the general question of truth is safe to irritate his readers.

On the larger issue of the advisability of discussing moral questions in fiction, it ought not to be necessary to say much. Admitting the

weakness of human nature, and it seems to me that in theoretical discussions we are too apt to neglect it, it must also be admitted that though men ought to find ethics of sufficient interest in themselves, they are not likely to do so. In the great movement for the abolition of the slave trade in the southern portion of the United States, 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' exercised an influence equal to that of a hundred pamphlets, and the view recently emphasized by Mr. Grant Allen, that a "verse may find him who a sermon flies," is too obvious to be disputed. Still, as a writer is hardly likely to find success at one time as a theologian and a poet, so novelists who choose to turn their novels into essays have much against them when it comes to a question of artistic merit. It will not unusually happen that their own attention is distracted from their characters, and as long as the question is alive,¹ their readers will have something else to think of than the truth of nature. Even Scott, though he has escaped the first danger, falls a victim to the second. We

¹ As long as the question is alive, since I imagine that a Greek religious problem would not seriously interfere with the artistic interests of a modern reader of a Greek play.

find ourselves thinking not of Jeanie Deans, but of her situation.

For the faults of a writer of such eminence there will always be found apologists, and it may be replied to the foregoing argument, that the mere fact of an imaginative author having a moral intention is not in itself sufficient to destroy the artistic effect, and that where the moral is found to intrude, it is as often to be blamed to the reader as to the writer. Suppose, for example, the apologists may say, Shakespeare had really written 'Macbeth' to make murder more odious still, or Hamlet to prove—to give an extravagant instance—that a poisoner should receive his dispatch when he is

“about some act
That has no relish of salvation in't,”

these plays would remain just what they are. 'Macbeth' and 'Hamlet' would still be two of the greatest tragedies in the world, even supposing one had been written to give Shakespeare's testimony where even Shakespeare's testimony was not needed, and the other to extend his sanction to the suggestions of superstitious ferocity; and if this be so, our apologists may

continue, why should Scott provoke cavil by doing what Shakespeare may have done? Surely the scruples of Jeanie Deans, provided they furnish the artist with a variety of interesting situations, and opportunity to study a heart torn with conflicting emotions, are as good a subject for imaginative treatment as the foibles of Oldbuck, the indecision of Morton, or the schemes of Rashleigh Osbaldistone. The answer is to be found in an examination of the instances. Allowing for a moment the supposition that Shakespeare's intentions were as represented, it is to be remarked that we are not troubled with them. When Hamlet gives utterance to his vindictive meditations, the reader does not pause to think of their moral complexion, his attention is wholly occupied with considering the curious convolutions of a mind that could snatch, as a cause for delay, at a notion so alien to its character. So in reading 'Macbeth,' where one deed of blackness is hustled upon another, nothing is further from our thoughts than the criminal law. Granted that Shakespeare's intentions were as stated, De Quincey laid his finger on the miracle of the masterpiece when he said that the play is so contrived that our

sympathy, "not our moral, but our intellectual sympathy," is with the usurper to the end. This is not the method of a moralist, and though of what a great artist thinks first, the wise moralist will also think, he will think of it last. Matter that is of paramount importance to ethical writers, Shakespeare, it will be found, keeps surprisingly to himself. Need it be added that in 'The Heart of Midlothian' Scott presses his moral intention with more than Shakespearian insistence?

The truth is that in selecting the story of Helen Walker as the basis for a novel, Scott went out of his way to create difficulties. In the first place, though he has not attempted to tell the story without raising a moral discussion, and indeed his effort is in the opposite direction, it would not have been easy to do so. In the second place, the story though true is improbable, and in the third the course of events prevents us from feeling an uninterrupted sympathy with the heroine. It is difficult even in reading 'The Heart of Midlothian' to believe that any woman with such a warmth of sisterly affection would have acted as Jeanie Deans did, nor does it avail us to be told that Helen Walker did actually act in precisely that manner, since there

are many things we have to accept as facts, of too rare occurrence for the purposes of fiction. Facts are but isolated truths, but fiction aims at the truth of nature. I suppose that the Admirable Crichton may have acted just as he is said to have acted, yet Ainsworth has done something to show that he makes an impossible hero for a novel. It is difficult to believe in Jeanie Deans' chief action, and this difficulty of belief chills sympathy at once. When we do believe, our sympathy is not active. The Roman who condemned his son to death acted from a sense of what justice required, yet we should consider that the demands both of ethics and humanity had been satisfied had the gods suddenly turned him to stone to stand in the market-place as a witness to his probity. An author who puts forward for such actions a claim for undivided admiration, asks too much from humanity. Mr. Stevenson, one of the most exquisite of artists, understood the philosophy of the matter when he proposed to assign such an act as the judicial condemnation of a son to a rugged and brutal character.¹ From

¹ 'Weir of Hermiston' remains a fragment, but it is doubtful if Mr. Stevenson would have carried out his

'Weir of Hermiston' we should have welcomed it. A far flight of virtue it would have appeared for his "clay carcass" to aspire to. It is different when we are asked to consider a similar action coming as the fine flower of an unblemished life. In these affairs of the imagination the judgment is always comparative, and where the virtue has no blackness to set it off, but claims approval for itself, we pause to analyze our sensations. Concerning the case of Jeanie Deans they are hopelessly divided: on the one side, truth, on the other, those affections on the strength of which society depends. It would be simple to multiply words in speaking of the beneficial agency of the family, of

"all the charities

Of father, son, and brother":

of that first school in which a man learns he cannot live by self. There is something suspicious in a virtue that is at war with the best instincts of our nature.²

intentions, he being informed that in Scotland at the beginning of the century, no father would have been permitted to sit in judgment on his son.

² The political reader is aware that the provision of the English law excluding the evidence of husband and wife, when one or the other is on trial, has been defended by

It is this many-sided difficulty that makes 'The Heart of Midlothian' an uncomfortable book, but how few books contain such wonderful things, how few heroines are so drawn to the life! Possibly, in the central and immortal part of it there are not more effective situations than in many other of Scott's novels. For mere quantity and brilliancy of episode, 'Rob Roy' will fairly compare even with 'The Heart of Midlothian.' What it wants is the seriousness, the dignity which comes of dealing with large concerns, that distinguishes the greater book. Jeanie's discovery that she is expected to give evidence, her self-communing thereupon, and her interview with her sister, the trial scene, the charming interlude of the parting between Dumbiedykes and Jeanie, that graver one when Madge tells her "sad tales" on the road to London, and the final interview with the Queen, these are incidents that have become part of every reader's experience; and they have become so, not because they are links in a chain of

reasoning similar to the above. May we see in the proposal to get rid of the provision altogether, the advancing claims of the State even when they are opposed to those of family?

exciting events, but because taken all together they serve to unfold a story of an essentially human interest.

Of three of these incidents, the trial scene, the meeting with Madge Wildfire, and the interview with Queen Caroline, it is impossible to speak adequately. They must be left, like much of Shakespeare, to make their own impression. When he comes actually to deal with Nature the critic is at a loss. A tree standing out sharply from the sky, "a violet by a mossy stone," the ceaseless movement of the waves, these are sights familiar enough, but which strike every observer differently. A man must give something to the outer world, for everything he receives from it; and it is in just proportion to what he brings that he will receive pleasure from these triumphs of imagination which seem Nature herself. We turn to the trial scene, and in place of what we expected to see, a harsh law administered by harsh men, we find ourselves transplanted to a period in which such laws were enacted, and, since then enacted, not then appearing as they appear to us now. We are no modern spectators passing censure lightly on bygone cruelties, but members of the audience

listening, with our hearts in our mouths, to the kindly judge pronouncing doom. We become, if the figure is not too startling, ourselves people of the past; and open our eyes with a start, as we might awake from a vivid dream, to find our own world unfamiliar. "Young woman," said the judge, "it is my painful duty to tell you, that your life is forfeited under a law, which, if it may seem in some degree severe, is yet wisely so, to render those of your unhappy situation aware what risk they run, by concealing, out of pride or false shame, their lapse from virtue." To understand the genius required to write that passage, is to have some idea of the insight which enabled Scott to see, behind the historical changes in customs and conventions, the real identity of men.

But if Scott is like Shakespeare here,—and I cannot but think that if Shakespeare had read the trial scene he would have recognized a kindred spirit,—he is even more plainly comparable with him when he comes to write of Madge Wildfire. There no doubt his task was — indefinitely difficult. Madness, the frenzy of the imagination loosed, seems especially to call for that imaginative treatment which only the

poet can give it. But beyond this, being, as any violent disturbance of law, unpleasing, it is especially unfitted for detailed description. If Shakespeare's imagination seldom shows to more advantage than when he is dealing with the mad Ophelia, it is there also, in the short space he has devoted to her, that we get an idea of his tact. The successful presentments of madness in prose fiction might be counted upon one's fingers. In his treatment of Madge Wildfire Scott took a hint from Cervantes. As with Don Quixote so with Madge. Till it comes to the deathbed her vagaries provoke a smile, and as it happens in the story of that pathetic madman, where the lightest chord is struck there is an undertone that is sad. In 'The Heart of Midlothian' Madge Wildfire takes up a large space; had every passage been as moving as the last we should not have suffered it. The novelist cannot afford to press his readers as hardly as the dramatist. One gets the contrast between Shakespeare's method and Scott's when one remembers that while the death of Madge is a catastrophe, the announcement of Ophelia's comes to the audience as a relief. Once or twice before that climax Scott's

madwoman breaks out into snatches of song, he thereby completing his picture, and coming as near to the truth of poetry as it is possible for prose in an essentially poetical matter to come.

“‘Ay ! is this Sunday?’ says Madge, replying to the rebuke of her strangely selected companion. ‘My mother leads sic a life, wi’ turning night into day, that ane loses a’ count o’ the days o’ the week, and disna ken Sunday frae Saturday. Besides, it’s a’ your whiggery—in England, folk sings when they like—and then, ye ken, you are Christiana, and I am Mercy—and ye ken, as they went on their way, they sang.’—And she immediately raised one of John Bunyan’s ditties:—

‘He that is down need fear no fall,
He that is low no pride ;
He that is humble ever shall
Have God to be his guide.

Fulness to such a burthen is
That go on pilgrimage ;
Here little, and hereafter bliss,
Is best from age to age.’

“‘And do ye ken, Jeanie, I think there’s much truth in that book, the Pilgrim’s Progress. The boy that sings that song was feeding his father’s sheep in the Valley of Humiliation, and Mr. Greatheart says, that he lived a merrier life, and had more of the herb called Heart’s-ease in his bosom, than they that wear silk and velvet like me, and are as bonny as I am.’”

How lightly the whole passage runs off with that touch of imaginative insight with which it is closed.

Of the characters in this novel of character there is little to be added to what has been so often said. As is usual, we are introduced to a various world. There is quite a host of sketches: the Saddletrees, Mrs. Balchristie, Ratcliffe, Mrs. Glass, the Duke of Argyll and Queen Caroline, some over-coloured, but two of them, Saddletree and the Duke, as good in their different ways of humorous exaggeration and literal accuracy, as any of the numerous subsidiary figures that Scott struck out in the rapid course of his authorship. Besides these there are at least five characters of importance: Jeanie Deans and Madge Wildfire; Butler, best perhaps in his introduction, and though capable of becoming tedious, throughout consistent; Davie Deans, always, I think, a little tiresome, but extraordinarily life-like, the one defect of both being that they repeat themselves; and Dumbiedykes, too continuously food for merriment, yet fulfilling his perennial office with a certain droll ripe naturalness infinitely pleasing. "The fools in Shakespeare," says Hazlitt, who never said a foolish thing, "are of his own or nature's making." It is the same with the fools in Scott. He too "had hardly such a thing as spleen in his com-

position." There was never a foible that his heart was not large enough to tolerate, or a folly he had not humorous sympathy to understand.

In dealing with the first of these characters he had much against him, the central incident on which Jeanie's fortunes hang, by its want of human warmth, putting our interest in her to the severest test. Here was a Scotch peasant girl who was about to act in a manner unusual, prompted by motives of a highly abstract kind. How was such a character to be made interesting or lovable? To understand that we have to read 'The Heart of Midlothian.' It was not possible, of course, to make the central action very probable or very attractive, and what was not possible has not been done. On the contrary, Scott, by giving to his heroine so feminine a character, has rather heightened the original improbability of the tale. Nevertheless our interest in her, and our sympathy with her troubles, are as uninterrupted as in the circumstances they could be, and this Scott has effected by emphasizing the fact that the precisian part of Jeanie is an inheritance, and by throwing the cold weight of it, and the main responsibility for it, on her father. The heroine of 'The Heart

of Midlothian' is represented as an unusually docile and womanly creature, upon whose nature it was no difficult task to graft enthusiastic principles, doubly attractive to her on account of their masterful rigidity. Not that there is anything artificial about her Cameronianism, it has become a real part of her, but the Sabbatarian who is so ready with her little sanctimonious rebukes, the altruist who is prepared to sacrifice everything for principle, though true to her acquired nature, is not as true, if the expression be allowable, to her natural nature, as the woman who utters her despairing cry when her father swoons in the Court, who demurely follows Madge Wildfire, or pleads before the Queen.

This is the magic of the alchemist: he has made his Roman sister not the least like the Roman father of legend,—a thing of virtuous stone,—but a creature soft, warm, and human, and in whom, even when she makes her sacrificing avowal, humanity cries out. And, looking at Jeanie in this light, it was a proper thing too that she should have been successful in her embassy—though one can imagine how Richardson would have scorned such a *dénouement*—it was a proper thing, as it seems, to bring out still

more effectively the main lines on which the character is built.]

“‘I have not the least doubt,’ said Argyll to Jeanie, as they were driving back in his carriage from the scene of his interview with Queen Caroline, ‘I have not the least doubt that the matter is quite certain.’

“‘O God be praised! God be praised!’ ejaculated Jeanie; ‘and may the gude leddy never want the heart’s ease she has gien me at this moment—And God bless you too, my Lord! without your help I wad ne’er hae won near her.’

“The Duke let her dwell upon this subject for a considerable time, curious, perhaps, to see how long the feelings of gratitude would continue to supersede those of curiosity. But so feeble was the latter feeling in Jeanie’s mind, that his Grace, with whom, perhaps, it was for the time a little stronger, was obliged once more to bring forward the subject of the Queen’s present. It was opened accordingly. In the inside of the case were the usual assortment of silk and needles, with scissors, tweezers, &c.; and in the pocket was a bank-bill for fifty pounds.

“The Duke had no sooner informed Jeanie of the value of this last document, for she was unaccustomed to see notes for such sums, than she expressed her regret at the mistake which had taken place. ‘For the hussy itsell,’ she said, ‘was a very valuable thing for a keepsake, with the Queen’s name written in the inside with her ain hand doubtless—*Caroline*—as plain as could be, and a crown drawn aboon it.’

“She therefore tendered the bill to the Duke, requesting him to find some mode of returning it to the royal owner.

“‘No, no, Jeanie,’ said the Duke, ‘there is no mistake in the case. Her Majesty knows you have been put to great expense, and she wishes to make it up to you.’

“‘I am sure she is even ower gude,’ said Jeanie, ‘and it glads me muckle that I can pay back Dumbiedykes his siller, without distressing my father, honest man.’

“‘Dumbiedykes? What, a freeholder of Mid-Lothian, is he not?’ said his Grace, whose occasional residence in that county made him acquainted with most of the heritors, as landed persons are termed in Scotland—‘He has a house not far from Dalkeith, wears a black wig and a laced hat?’

“‘Yes, sir,’ answered Jeanie, who had her reasons for being brief in her answers upon this topic.

“‘Ah! my old friend Dumbie!’ said the Duke; ‘I have thrice seen him fou, and only once heard the sound of his voice—Is he a cousin of yours, Jeanie?’

“‘No, sir,—my Lord.’

“‘Then he must be a well-wisher, I suspect?’

“‘Ye—yes,—my Lord, sir,’ answered Jeanie, blushing and with hesitation.

“‘Aha! then, if the Laird starts, I suppose my friend Butler must be in some danger?’

“‘O no, sir,’ answered Jeanie much more readily, but at the same time blushing much more deeply.”

And this is the woman who was ready for her sacrifice. What could better exemplify the tender and confiding heart, what could be more in keeping than the whole of this trivial incident with the fantastic fitfulness of events? Every one must know, how, after the most serious occasions, occasions in which all is at the

hazard,—some life perhaps inexpressibly dear,—and in which the rush of feeling seems to swamp its gentler gradations, there succeeds, when the tension is relaxed, a period in which every sensation is on the alert, and one trembles on the verge of divided emotions. It is then, in this ecstatic condition, when one may either break down, give oneself up to happy laughter, or pass from one phase of feeling to the other, that one's essential thoughts, the mind being swept vacant of merely transitory impressions, will be startlingly apparent. The world, with its thousand interests, has for a time been forgotten, and now when it returns upon us, what is dearest in it will be the first to return. “‘O no,’ sir,” answered Jeanie much more readily, but at the same time blushing much more deeply.” Had she ever confessed as much to herself, before the relief following on the success of her long embassy had brought her secret to her lips? ♥

And so Scott tells us with the sagest of smiles, that after all Jeanie Deans did not live for the fulfilment of a remorseless duty, but for the satisfaction of “those thoughts, those passions, those delights,” which, since the weary world began, have so charmingly tormented and en-

nobled the daughters of men. O! the sage and dear master, and knew he not also, let us not grant to it a moment's dubiety, of how little consequence is an illustration of the best of moral axioms, of the straitest of rules to guide our conduct of every day, when compared with what we can learn when he shows us the movements of the heart.

CHAPTER III

SCOTT AS A NOVELIST OF ACTION

THE writer who has a thesis to develop often finds himself in the position of having to face uncomfortable facts. Where his thesis is an old established one, and it has become a kind of maxim with the public that it is true, he will be tempted to give too little weight to whatever makes against it, and even where the fancied interests of the majority are not bound up with the case, there is nothing of which the majority is so fond as black and white. A theory that admits of seeming exceptions, that cannot be stated quite nakedly, is safe to be wanting in popular attraction. Yet it is better that it should lack this than that it should be exposed to ruin at the first whiff of sane consideration. The large proposition with which these pages open, that the sphere of the novel is that of character rather

than that of action, must not be taken to express more than is said. Already in speaking of Scott's novels of character it has been indicated that the two spheres cannot be kept distinct, and that the novelist who wishes to elucidate character fully, to display both its depth and variety, must keep in mind the importance of action. Yet with this, as it must be admitted, it would still be possible to assert, if one cared to indulge in unattached theorizing, that the novelist who devotes his attention exclusively to action will fail. Unfortunately for the simplicity of the present thesis, the facts will not fit with this view. If there ever was a novel that was exclusively a novel of action, it is 'The Bride of Lammermoor;' if there ever was a successful production, it is this novel in which Scott frankly adopts the methods of the drama. Under the circumstances all that the critic may reasonably attempt to show is that what the novel achieves, it achieves with difficulty, as if about a work alien to its character, and that in some particulars it misses the highest dramatic success.

The first and last impression of the reader of 'The Bride of Lammermoor' is one of astonish-

ment, and certainly no one who had only read Scott's poems could have suspected that he kept concealed within him, to be revealed ten years after the publication of 'The Lady of the Lake,' and of all places in a novel, such a fund of poetical feeling. Vivid as his poems are, full of martial ardour, and refined by passages of delicate description, they display nowhere the same intensity of imagination and passion, which is apparent in this romance, that occupies a place by itself among his voluminous productions. As a poet Scott has many excellences, but if his whole work be considered it will be seen that his distinguishing excellences are those of a great prose author: his novels as well as his poems, with the necessary exception of occasional passages, are the productions of a man whose genius inclined to prose rather than to poetry. With all his knowledge of the world, and of the people who compose it, with all his fondness for great actions and his admirable contempt for the trivial incidents which are the frequent stock in trade of the novelist, he had not in any degree the Shakespearian or poetical insight, he had not more than a hint of that imagination, supposed to belong peculiarly to

poets, which sees beyond what is to be seen. And this is perhaps why imaginative children so often do not take kindly to Scott; his power of telling stories does not impress them as much as it ought, since if there is one thing an imaginative child can do, it is to tell itself stories all day long, and his knowledge of character does not impress them at all, because children are practically ignorant of character. They miss in him those flashes which in the poets illumine for them a world outside their own. It is true that they do not know what it is they miss, and if they are questioned will probably give the wrong reason why it happens that they so often, unlike older people, find the *Waverley Novels* wearisome. But it is easy to test it for ourselves. Let a boy of fourteen read 'Macbeth,' and though he will not understand it he will come under its spell; he will feel that the master is speaking to him of a world to which youth does not possess the key. To give the same boy 'Quentin Durward' is to find oneself listening to the complaint that it is dull, and perhaps also to the explanation that there is not a quick enough succession of romantic incidents. Yet as every mature reader of 'Quentin Durward' knows,

there is quite sufficient incident in the novel, and what does make it go slowly is not the want of incident, but the want of the vivifying insight of the poet. The thing is a trifle laboured ; we learn all about Louis, but we learn all about him, as we should learn all about him in real life, by taking trouble, whereas the poet—we may keep to Shakespeare as the perfect instance of a man working by poetical methods—saves us trouble everywhere, he makes his effects by a few sudden strokes of the pen. Scott, simply because he is a prose author, will always be under-rated by the young, as he will always be rated at his full value, if not over-rated, by those past middle age, on whom the poetical imagination is losing its hold. Plato's apparently enigmatical proposition that poetry is a noble lie, does not seem particularly enigmatical to those who have been brought, by the tedious teaching of life, to recognize that the world, unless indeed we infuse something of ourselves into it, is a place in which predominates the colour of grey.

Possibly, to the careful observer, the qualities that make Scott so dear to men of experience are not absent even from 'The Bride of Lammer-

moor.' There is matter in the book which belongs evidently to the province of prose, as distinguished from that of the poetical imagination, an excessive insistence on the work-a-day humour of Caleb Balderstone, and quite sufficient insistence on the prose delights of the conversations, how admirable in themselves! between Bucklaw and his swaggering henchman. Poetical as the book is, and dependent on this quality for its effect, it hardly ever ventures into regions of such height that matters more appertaining to prose are altogether forgotten. To see this, one does not need to place it beside purely poetical compositions such as 'Hamlet;' it is enough to place it beside works produced in the same medium, such as 'The Scarlet Letter,' since whatever be the respective merits of the two romances, it will not be disputed that Hawthorne's is the more consistently poetical and touches less often on the ordinary world. 'The Bride of Lammermoor' is a work differing in degree rather than in kind from many of Scott's other novels, few of which do not contain situations of which a dramatist would have eagerly caught hold. Nevertheless it differs greatly in degree; for while in all the others it is the prose author who

especially arrests attention, this particular book lays claim to be judged as a prose composition with a poetical excellence, as a production in which we have to do with a poet. Its place among the Waverley Novels is singular. One wonders how it happened that in this one romance that side of Scott's genius which is elsewhere subordinate, should have been exercised so freely. It has been plausibly suggested that, the main *motif* of his story leading him to think of 'Hamlet,' he was insensibly drawn to model his incidents on those in Shakespeare's tragedy, and that they, thus formed, gave a colour unusual with him to his thoughts. As Mr. Balsillie says in an admirable paper, unfortunately buried in the pages of a defunct publication, 'The Ladder,' which appeared in 1891—"A comparison of Scott's tragedy of 'The Bride of Lammermoor' with Shakespeare's 'Hamlet' will bring out several points of curious interest," and he continues—"The points of resemblance on the surface are striking if they are coincidences merely." "In each the hero's life is shadowed by an obligation to avenge a father's wrongs. Ravenswood resembles Hamlet in not a few points. Both are men of lofty aims, which are thwarted by their

terrible legacy of revenge. Lucy Ashton again is the twin sister of Ophelia, and falls under the same dark fate. Sir William is as astute a diplomatist as Polonius, and not quite such a caricature"—not at all a caricature, I should say. "If a ghost roused Hamlet to his duty, the spirit of blind Alice at the Mermaiden's Fountain reminded Ravenswood of his. The very grave-diggers of Shakespeare have their representatives in Scott's tale. The presence of Ravenswood at Lucy's funeral, and the stern challenge given and accepted there, remind one of the scene between Hamlet and Laertes beside Ophelia's grave; and if Ravenswood did not fall by the sword of Lucy's brother, he was on the way to do so, when, in fulfilment of the Wizard's prophecy, he found a tomb in the Kelpie's flow." But those incidents, while exhausting the list with which those of 'Hamlet' may be directly compared, do not exhaust the list of poetical incidents in 'The Bride of Lammermoor.' Ravenswood and Lucy never appear unless in some effective situation, set with dramatic propriety. Lucy and the Lord Keeper visit old Alice, a situation in which an Elizabethan dramatist would have delighted. On their return, Ravenswood appears

in the nick of time to save them from the attack of a wild bull, and later on in the romance they are detained by a storm in the ruinous castle of Wolf's Crag. All these and many other incidents are not only poetical in themselves, but are treated far more poetically than is usual with Scott. He appears to have set himself to write a Shakespearian tragedy in narrative form, and though possessing neither Shakespeare's imagination nor his sense of proportion, he has succeeded in producing a work of consummate excellence. It is worth while to notice how he has produced it, and what reliance he places on the art of the drama.

From the dramatic excellence of the book there is little that detracts. That Scott should introduce, in the midst of his scenes of passion and feeling, humorous or matter-of-fact interludes, cannot be said to detract from it. The English dramatists are famous for their fondness for this device, and to what varying use Shakespeare has put it may be seen in 'Hamlet' and 'Macbeth.' However, on these interludes, unobjectionable and often of the highest merit in themselves, Scott lays unnecessary stress. The single fault of 'The Bride of Lammermoor' is

that we have too much of them. Caleb is both too farcical and too important, he breaks the thread of our thoughts, and becomes interesting for himself; he is not like Shakespeare's porter, a mere aid to the action. It is difficult to keep the exact proportion in these things. Hawthorne's 'Scarlet Letter' wants something of that of which 'The Bride of Lammermoor' has too much. Hawthorne wants to have his feet more firmly planted on the ground, Scott wants to get rather more free from it. He wants it doubtless everywhere; all his novels would be improved and would gain in weight and depth were he more detached from the realm of plain affairs. Even 'The Bride of Lammermoor' would gain by it, and though in reality in 'The Bride of Lammermoor' this attachment of his is less obvious than elsewhere, in a sense it is more obvious, just because in this romance he has in general made a real attempt to leave the work-a-day world behind.

Strange then is his success here, so strange that with his especial devotees, with those who love his flavour because it is his, 'The Bride of Lammermoor' has never received quite the admiration it deserves. If Scott had produced

works, which, considered singly, were, next to Shakespeare's, the greatest works of the English imagination, a feat which with all his excellences he has undoubtedly not achieved, and if Scott was pre-eminently a prose author, as undoubtedly with all his poetical excellences he was, then the works he produced while following his bent, 'The Antiquary' or 'The Heart of Midlothian' or 'Rob Roy,' which rest on the merit of their characters, are likely to be found most excellent. If, in short, as an artist he had nothing to learn, then the productions which came from him most naturally, and in which he was not attempting to get away from himself, must stand higher than a book so conscious an effort throughout as 'The Bride of Lammermoor.' And much may be said for this contention even if we put forward no such claim for Scott as an artist. Still the facts are to be considered. 'The Antiquary' can have cost its author little trouble. 'The Bride of Lammermoor' must have cost him much, yet the 'Antiquary' is not a more striking success in the domain of prose than the 'Bride of Lammermoor' in that of the poetical imagination. All that can be said is, that when Scott was writing as the nature of the novel led him, it

was easy for him to do wonders, but that when it came to adventuring into a new field he had need of his powers.

It is another question whether the story would not have gained if cast in dramatic form. One must admit, I think, that¹ though the highest dramatic success is likely to be found in the drama, and not in an art which imitates it, the same artist who is able to make his narrative dramatic may be at a loss when he abandons narrative altogether. In Scott's case we have reason for congratulation that abstract considerations did not weigh with him. His work in poetry had given no indication that he was fitted even when at his best to write a great drama, and though he continued fitfully to write verses for some considerable time after 'The Bride of Lammermoor' was published, his poetical powers, ever since the production of 'The Lady of the Lake,' had suffered a decline. His power as a prose writer was at its height; in the medium of prose narrative he had already won by far the most substantial of his successes.

Fielding has been called the prose Homer of human nature; it would be as proper to call Scott the prose Shakespeare of human nature, for what

prevents him from being comparable with Shakespeare is just that—he is a prose Shakespeare—and what makes him in a sense comparable with Shakespeare is this, that for an essentially prose author, for one of his constitution, and for one working in his medium the sum of his achievement is not far short of being as wonderful. Scott, need it be said, is never so profound, has never so comprehensive a view as Shakespeare, and thus the distance between Falstaff and Hamlet is incomparably greater than that between Oldbuck and Ravenswood. For all that there is the same sort of distinction. Falstaff and Hamlet are conceptions at the opposite poles of a poet's world, Oldbuck and Ravenswood at those of the world, and wide and varied it is, which is open to the novelist. Falstaff and Hamlet are both poetical conceptions, but Falstaff comes near the world of prose, while though Oldbuck is purely a prose conception, Ravenswood is one that intrudes upon the domain of the great dramatic poets. Shakespeare is so great a poet, that while remaining a poet he can swoop down into a kind of sublimated world of every day : Scott is so great a prose writer, that while remaining a prose writer he can venture,

and venture with success, into the world of the poets. This is not the same thing indeed, for the one world is far wider and more profound than the other, but in its degree it is a comparable thing.

Let us turn for example to the scene at old Alice's "winding." Ravenswood, startled by the apparition of old Alice at the fountain, rides on to her cottage, in front of which was the "turf-seat placed under a weeping birch of unusual magnitude and age," where in the opening of the romance she had been found seated, as "Judah is represented sitting under her palm-tree, with an air at once of majesty and dejection." There he finds the corpse awaiting the last offices at the hands of three old crones, to whom he gives directions respecting the charge of the body. This duty performed he turns to remount his horse.

"While busying himself," says Scott, "with adjusting the girths of the saddle, he could not avoid hearing, through the hedge of the little garden, a conversation respecting himself, betwixt the lame woman and the octogenarian sibyl. The pair had hobbled into the garden to gather rosemary, southernwood, rue, and other plants proper to be strewed upon the body, and burned by way of fumigation in the chimney of the cottage. The paralytic wretch, almost exhausted by the journey,

was left guard upon the corpse, lest witches or fiends might play their sport with it.

"The following low croaking dialogue was necessarily overheard by the Master of Ravenswood:—'That's a fresh and full-grown hemlock, Annie Winnie—mony a cummer lang syne wad hae sought nae better horse to flee over hill and how, through mist and moonlight, and light down in the King of France's cellar.'

"'Ay, cummer! but the very deil has turned as hard-hearted now as the Lord Keeper, and the grit folk that hae breasts like whinstane. They prick us and they pine us, and they pit us on the pinny-winkles for witches; and, if I say my prayers backwards ten times ower, Satan will never gie me amends o' them.'

"'Did ye ever see the foul thief?' asked her neighbour.

"'Na!' replied the other spokeswoman; 'but I trow I hae dreamed of him mony a time, and I think the day will come they will burn me for 't.—But ne'er mind, cummer! we hae this dollar of the Master's, and we'll send doun for bread and for yill, and tobacco, and a drap brandy to burn, and a wee pickle saft sugar—and be there deil, or nae deil, lass, we'll hae a merry night o't.'

"Here her leathern chops uttered a sort of cackling ghastly laugh, resembling, to a certain degree, the cry of the screech-owl.

"'He's a frank man, and a free-handed man, the Master,' said Annie Winnie, 'and a comely personage—broad in the shouthers, and narrow around the lungies—he wad mak a bonny corpse—I wad like to hae the streaking and winding o' him.'

"'It is written on his brow, Annie Winnie,' returned the octogenarian, her companion, 'that hand of woman, or of man either, will never straught him—dead-deal will never be laid on his back—make you your market of that, for I hae it frae a sure hand.'

“Will it be his lot to die on the battle-ground then, Ailsie Gourlay?—Will he die by the sword or the ball, as his forbears hae dune before him, mony ane o’ them?”

“Ask nae mair questions about it—he’ll no be graced sae far,” replied the sage.

“I ken ye are wiser than ither folk, Ailsie Gourlay. But wha tell’d ye this?”

“Fashna your thumb about that, Annie Winnie,” answered the sibyl—“I hae it frae a hand sure enugh.”

“But ye said ye never saw the foul thief,” reiterated her inquisitive companion.

“I hae it frae as sure a hand,” said Ailsie, “and frae them that spaed his fortune before the sark gaed ower his head.”

“Hark!. I hear his horse’s feet riding aff,” said the other; “they dinna sound as if good luck was wi’ them.”

“Mak haste, sirs,” cried the paralytic hag from the cottage, “and let us do what is needfu’, and say what is fitting; for, if the dead corpse binna straughted, it will girn and thraw, and that will fear the best o’ us.”

These are not Shakespeare’s witches. To transplant them to a prose narrative would be impossible, and, were it possible, when transplanted they would take no hold of our belief. Scott with his fine artistic sense—and how fine it was when he chose to give it play!—knew that had he introduced spirits of evil into his romance, he would have detracted from one of its chief merits, the firm grasp with which, poetical though it is, it keeps hold of the world of sense; and so

his old women, induced by their charnel-house fancies to think themselves in touch with "the powers of the air," are but old women still. How much merit there is in this conception ! In poetry the creatures of the imagination have an actual and visible life ; in prose, however vivid are our fancies, we must know them to be such : in poetry the imagination can create, but in prose the belief in fable can do no more than influence the character. Obedient to the limitations of his art, Scott has done everything. Though he has not trespassed beyond the province of fact, he has succeeded in terrifying his readers, and some of them, no doubt, even more than Shakespeare terrifies them, since there must always be those who are more awake to material than to spiritual alarms. The slow travelling mind which refuses artistic credence to the weird sisters, cannot but be struck by these gruesome figures of Scott's, that show themselves unabashed in the daylight.

If we are ever to get an adequate conception of 'The Bride of Lammermoor' we must judge of it as a whole. Of all Scott's novels it is the most artistic, and the best fitted to be so judged. It stands out from the rest of them, not so

sharply, but much in the same way as 'Esmond' from the other productions of Thackeray. In most of the Waverley Novels, excellent though the story may be, we forget the story and remember the characters; in 'The Bride of Lammermoor,' excellent though the characters are, we forget the characters in our interest in their fate. The story proceeds for a time at leisure, till everything is put in order for the suddenly descending catastrophe, as Lachesis may turn the wheel slowly till Atropos cuts the thread; and though this swiftness of conclusion is an excellence that belongs rather to the drama than to the novel, 'The Bride of Lammermoor' is throughout so essentially dramatic that that is a merit in it which in 'Old Mortality' was a blemish. The romance follows roughly the lines of dramatic division. In the first act, an account having been given of the hero and heroine, their meeting is effected. The second and third acts are occupied with the various incidents marking the growth of their acquaintance, the third ending with the parting of the lovers. The fourth is devoted chiefly to the development of the counter-plot, which during the second and third has risen into prominence, and the fifth act, as

in 'Hamlet,' narrates the hero's return and the subsequent catastrophe. Except when dealing with Bucklaw or with Craigengelt, the narrative has a dramatic swiftness; a few touches and Lady Ashton, Colonel Ashton, and Lucy's brother Henry take their places as effective subsidiary characters. Even Lucy, though she appears often, makes her effect quickly when she does appear. Ravenswood and the Lord Keeper are sketched with greater attention to detail, yet both always appear in character. Both comport themselves with the same kind of dramatic consistency as Balfour of Burley in 'Old Mortality'; neither varies as Oldbuck in 'The Antiquary' varies, with the small but surprising variations of a slowly developing nature. They are figures seen with the insight of the poet, and, curiously enough, considered for his separate interest, Ravenswood is as good, as forcible, and as life-like as the more strictly prose figures that are so common in Scott's other novels: nay, what is more remarkable, since the wonder excited by Scott's achievement would be less had he abandoned the prose field altogether, Ravenswood is as good as the prose figures in 'The Bride of Lammermoor,' he does not suffer when placed

by the side of Caleb Balderstone, poetry does not become theatrical by juxtaposition with prose. On the contrary it is prose that suffers, and Caleb, who is not intrinsically as much of a caricature as Andrew Fairservice, seems, of the two, the more overdrawn, because he is placed in the more impressive surroundings.

Nothing is more puzzling to the critic of Scott than the combination in his nature of extraordinary artistic insight, and an almost constitutional levity in regard to his art. The conception of Caleb Balderstone is an unusually fine one. It is ironical, this idea of a retainer with his mind set on dishes while his master is thinking of death, and as Scott occasionally manages it, it is irony of a very beautiful and lucid kind. Moreover it was a *tour de force* for him in his delineation of his serving-man to pitch humour and pathos both so high, and yet leave behind an ultimate impression of reality. Admirable use is made of the conception of Caleb, but at the same time a too frequent use. The same note is struck too often and too loudly. We see things as they are. The theft of the supper, and the unending preparations, become burlesque; the fictitious burning of

Wolf's Crag is too broad a stroke—Shakespeare's gravediggers might as well have played at bowls with the skulls they disinterred—not that Scott will allow even an occurrence so much beneath the dignity of his sombre tragedy to escape him, without showing to what account, had he chosen to treat it seriously, he might have turned it.

“Ravenswood,” runs the narrative, “no sooner found himself alone, than, impelled by a thousand feelings, he left the apartment, the house, and the village, and hastily retraced his steps to the brow of the hill, which rose betwixt the village, and screened it from the tower, in order to view the final fall of the house of his fathers. Some idle boys from the hamlet had taken the same direction out of curiosity, having first witnessed the arrival of the coach-and-six and its attendants. As they ran one by one past the Master, calling to each other to ‘come and see the auld tower blaw up in the lift like the peelings of an ingan,’ he could not but feel himself moved with indignation. ‘And these are the sons of my father’s vassals,’ he said—‘of men bound, both by law and gratitude, to follow our steps through battle, and fire, and flood; and now the destruction of their liege-lord’s house is but a holiday’s sight to them!’

“These exasperating reflections were partly expressed in the acrimony with which he exclaimed, on feeling himself pulled by the cloak,—‘What do you want, you dog?’

“‘I am a dog, and an auld dog too,’ answered Caleb, for it was he who had taken the freedom, ‘and I am like

to get a dog's wages—but it does not signification a pinch of sneeshing, for I am ower auld a dog to learn new tricks, or to follow a new master.'”

It is impossible to improve such passages, and equally impossible to avoid wishing that they had been set in surroundings less grotesque. In the same way, the meeting between the Marquis of A. and Lady Ashton in the hall of the Lord Keeper's house, is both artistic and impressive, but one finds oneself laughing as one recollects that their carriages were near coming into farcical collision at the entrance to the avenue.

There are faults, perhaps, which the writer could not readily avoid. It is no such easy thing to turn a drama into narrative form, without either becoming tedious, or seeking the relief which inconsequential humour affords, the more especially if the author's genius inclines him to excursions of the kind. What is noticeable is that here Scott should on the whole have kept so free from them, the book being remarkable among his many remarkable productions, not only for itself but as coming from him. For while in the 'Bride of Lammermoor' there is much that is characteristic of Scott, there is also

much of which before he had given only vague forewarnings, a consistently dramatic intention, a passionate intensity, and a poetical seriousness, contriving in combination to challenge comparison with the work, not so much of his successors in prose, as of his forerunners in poetry.

In his historical novels it was a task of a totally different order which he essayed, and it would be a superficial criticism which neglected the distinction. In the 'Bride of Lammermoor' the action interests, as far as it is ever possible for action to do so, for itself; in 'Quentin Durward' it subserves as definite a purpose as in 'The Antiquary.' In the latter, Scott's gaze is concentrated on the characters, in the former on the past age, which it was his desire to bring back to us. In such novels as 'Quentin Durward,' 'Ivanhoe,' and 'Kenilworth,' the fictitious story performs no other office than that of sustaining our interest; it is on what it lights up as it shifts along that our real attention is fixed. What reader of 'The Talisman' is the least concerned after the meeting between Richard and Saladin, as to what happens to Sir Kenneth and his fair lady? We must not look upon Scott's

historical novels as novels of action, though that they are so there can be no question, any more than we must consider them as historical narratives claiming to be judged by the ordinary rules. They are in reality as much novels of character as 'The Antiquary' or 'Guy Mannering,' the difference being this, that in his historical novels Scott is not studying the character of individuals, but the character of a period or reign. It is only when we so consider them that the real weight of his achievement becomes apparent, as also the futility of the objections which are ordinarily urged against him as a historical artist. We provide ourselves with a complete justification for his playful dealing with fact, without forfeiting our right to rely on the more ordinary and extremely sensible defence which has become stereotyped.

"A mixture of a lie," said the wisest of Lord Chancellors, "doth ever add pleasure," and one is reminded of the saying as one turns the pages of the numberless essays, that find in the Waverley Novels every literary virtue but the virtue of historical exactitude. Scott gives us, their writers complain, too bright a picture of past times, the sun shines upon too many lords

and ladies, and even the serving-man and serf have their little portion of pleasure, whereas do we not know that for every lord there were a thousand serfs, for every lady a thousand bond-women, and that these unfortunates lived upon black bread and water, and spent their time, when they were not shrinking under the lash, in forced and hereditary service? Do we not know that the men who laboured on their lords' plantations were consumed with an inward rage against the distinctions between villeinage and the tenures of free socage and knight-service, and the whole lawyer and priest-supported machinery for the oppression of the poor? Have we not reason to suppose, exclaim these writers, that the world of the Middle Ages was for the majority a singularly unhappy one? what judgment would we pass on a novelist who wrote of the Roman Empire without taking note of the harsh condition of the slave?

To misrepresent the attitude of these critics is far from my intention, and indeed it is only one of the questions here put into their mouths that is not sure of an affirmative reply. The world of the Middle Ages, the world in which Richard jousted and Louis XI mumbled over

his beads, contained, doubtless, all the suffering and all the inequalities which modern humanity finds there: serfs were ill-treated, women were abused and on the question of property there was no sufficiently broad distinction between children and cattle. Nor is it to be imagined that these hardships passed unheeded; it does not require a peculiarly sensitive organization to feel hunger and the whip; here and there at the foot of the social ladder it is certain that there were even those who actively rebelled against their condition. Only here and there, however, for though it may seem a paradox, it is probably true, that those inequalities and hardships were less offensive then than now. They were taken much more as a matter of course, and since mankind in the rough has always been inclined to believe that whatever is, is right, and the fool, however miserable his mental or physical state, to sing, few thought of criticizing them. To view ancient society as Mark Twain views it in his sincere and interesting book, 'A Yankee at the Court of King Arthur,' is to lose the historical perspective. Those features of the life of the feudal ages, which to a modern American are especially noteworthy, passed in the days of long ago with

what appears to us now as incredibly little notice. Mark Twain himself acknowledges as much when he emphasizes the difficulties which his astute piece of modernity experienced in making clear to the bondsmen the hardness of their lot. Had Scott painted the Middle Ages as a modern historian would paint them, neglecting nothing of their sordid detail, he would have sacrificed not only half the effect, but half the truth of his picture. We should have learned what the Middle Ages were, and not, what in a measure we have, how they appeared to the men of the Middle Ages. It is this, then, that on the question of Scott's essential accuracy, we have to bear in mind. We have to remember that, however much more patent than Scott has represented them, were the uneven chances of life in the particular state of society which then existed, the attention of the poorer classes would not be directed solely to this, but also and surely in a greater degree to the same picturesque and outstanding incidents which catch our attention. Let any one suppose, what requires no exertion of fancy, that a serf had seen in one day another serf flogged, and "the pleasant and joyous" passage of arms at Ashby-de-la-Zouche, and then

let him ask himself of which of these occurrences the serf, stretched at night on his straw pallet, would be likely to dream—let him ask himself that, before he dismisses the Waverley Novels offhand as historical caricatures. As much as this may be urged, before reliance is placed on the truth which Bacon's aphorism crystallizes, in general denial of a charge that has been too frequently and lightly brought.

But the fact is that no novelist, no literary artist, is bound, in dealing with a historical period, to satisfy the same minute standards by which a historian is tried. He is bound, when treating of a historical period, unless writing, as Shakespeare in 'Lear,' without a historical intention, to remain true to the character of the times of which he speaks, but he is not bound to do more than this. As long as he represents his antique world much as in general outline it was, he is free to pay tribute to his art, and to exalt to an undue pre-eminence the more striking characteristics of the society he depicts. Richard, perhaps, was not altogether so chivalrous as Scott represents him, nor James so petty, nor Elizabeth so masculine; but something must be allowed to the claims of the picturesque, some-

thing must be forgiven to the artist if his imaginations become at times "imaginations as one would." "Doth any man doubt," asks Bacon, "that if there were taken out of men's minds vain opinions, flattering hopes, false valuations, imaginations as one would, and the like, but it would leave the lives of a number of men poor shrunken things?" And certainly without Scott's historical romances we, as regards our conceptions of the periods he has made real to us, would, to some extent, be shrunken. The freedom he took was no unreasonable freedom, being, if the worst were allowed, but "the mixture of a lie." Nor can it be said that any one is likely to suffer from Scott's habit of exalting the knightly characteristics of "the knightly days of old." "It is not," says Bacon, "the lie that passeth through the mind, but the lie that sinketh in and settleth in it that does the hurt," and Scott's lie does not sink or settle in. Those who depend on a historical novelist for their knowledge of history can hardly be numerous, and cannot be wise. It would be to inquire too curiously to ask how far in the *Waverley Novels* we receive an exact account of the periods described.

All that can be expected of a literary artist, and possibly all that is to be desired, since where precise accuracy is unobtainable it is best not to attempt it, is that he should give us a rough sketch of the character of the epoch. The historian comes to Scott's historical novels biassed against them; he knows well that the method of the great romancer is not the method of the careful recorder, so far indeed from it that it almost looks as if he had had a standing quarrel with fact. To turn to many of these historical romances is to find the dates carelessly, I had almost said carefully, distorted. To take two instances from a hundred. Leicester's first wife, Amy Robsart, had been dead for fifteen years before he entertained Elizabeth at Kenilworth, yet in the novel Amy Robsart meets the Queen in Leicester's gardens during the famous *fêtes*. Shakespeare did not begin writing plays, on the earliest computation, before 1589, yet Elizabeth in 1575 is represented as quoting from 'Troilus and Cressida,' which must thus have been the production of a boy of eleven. The novels are full of such instances, and the historian who finds a novelist indulging in licence of this kind may be excused

if he looks with suspicion on his general estimate of a historical period. Nevertheless to understand the service Scott did for history, we must keep clear in our minds the distinction between misrepresenting the facts, and misrepresenting the character, of a reign. His inaccuracy in the one case is no more remarkable than his essential accuracy in the other. He cared nothing for the letter, so long as he was true to the spirit; nay, so right is his instinct for the spirit of the times he describes, that the facts twist and turn themselves anyhow till they come to fit. In an account of Elizabeth's reign it was necessary that Shakespeare should figure, so Shakespeare finds himself born thirty years before his birth. Despite their thousand inaccuracies, their carelessly arranged dates, their jumble of fictitious fact and fiction, 'Ivanhoe,' 'Kenilworth,' 'The Fortunes of Nigel,' 'Quentin Durward,' and 'The Abbot' carry us back not to the past only, but to definite periods of the past. The world of 'Kenilworth' is as distinct from the world of 'Quentin Durward,' as the world of 'Quentin Durward' is distinct from that of 'Ivanhoe.' In each of them we catch the air of the time; we get, so to speak, its

feeling right, we appreciate its character. And looking for no more than this, we may reasonably refuse to range ourselves with those who exclaim against works which, properly understood, perform their office so well.

Regarded from this attitude 'Ivanhoe,' the most famous of those historical novels, is also one of the most instructive. We read the account of Cœur de Lion's actions in the pages of many historians, and if the chronicler is dry it seems dull, if the chronicler is vivid, improbable. But Scott, though he uses unnecessarily improbable incidents, makes Richard at once a possible and an interesting figure. There are no inequalities in the portrait. Free from any bondage to fact, and having caught the salient features of Richard's nature, he proceeds to emphasize them. There is no question of any action being out of Richard's ordinary course, being in need of explanation, or putting the rest of his doings into the shade. Everything seems to be in place because everything is in character, and Pelion placed beside Ossa does not look as huge as a smaller solitary hill. Largely by the frank use of this method, the whole of that old world, which as we read the history books

appeared so dim or so fantastic, is quickened to an extraordinary life. Robin Hood steps out of the coloured illustrations to the children's stories and moves about with the zest of the old ballads that had made him their hero: the Crusaders wear their armour not like actors at a masquerade, but as men to the habit born: the pageantry of the reign dances before us—proud maidens of high Saxon degree, pretty persecuted Jewesses, grand-masters, jesters, swineherds, and disinherited sons.

'Ivanhoe' has been called the best of historical novels, and though, since it wants the necessary sobriety, it is hardly that, one sees why it should have caught public attention more than 'Quentin Durward' and 'Kenilworth,' novels with greater historical merit, and a firmer grasp of life. The public, in passing its bizarre judgment, has appreciated rightly the difficulty of the three achievements. Hard as it was to represent the courts of Louis or Elizabeth, it was incomparably harder to represent the clanking soldiers in 'Ivanhoe.' Armour is now but "monumental mockery," and let the links in the chain-mail coat be ever so real, Harry Percy is but a pasteboard figure on the stage. The world of

tourneys, of lady-loves, and by my halidoms, has gone down the wind. Poetry alone can revivify the age of steel. Something of her fire and elemental ardour is needed to sustain these chivalric passages that seem to us, living in an age of sobriety and prose, a little too ardent, a little boyish. The strange oaths remind us of a time when we were deeply impressed by the mere quantity of them, the battle-axes that split so many crowns have a smack of the curiosity shop, and we are amazed when we remember that men once went out to decide a quarrel without the danger of being blown by an unseen enemy into a million smithereens. What a pother, we repeat to ourselves, about the rusty gate of the castle of Torquilstone, when one of the dynamitards of modern fiction had but to take a packet from his waistcoat-pocket and puff the "fortress of no great size" to the four corners of the "casing air."

Do what we will, we cannot take it seriously, and those who account 'Rebecca and Rowena' the best of parodies have to remember that seldom a better subject came to a parodist's hand. The period in which 'Quentin Durward' is cast is nearly two hundred years nearer our

own day than that of 'Ivanhoe'; the action of 'Kenilworth' takes place quite at the end of the days of chivalry. While 'Quentin Durward' is a novel dealing chiefly with the council-chamber, and 'Kenilworth' one that does not introduce warfare, 'Ivanhoe' is a romance of the field. As the world grows older, we add little to our knowledge of love-making or statecraft, but fighting changes with the weapons employed. Milton's ærial battle between the spirits of the nether and those of the upper air, would be an odd incident for a novel, and though Crusaders have a better right to a prose existence than fallen angels, they are not comfortable material for a novelist.

Difficulties enough then faced Scott when he set about the composition of 'Ivanhoe.' In such circumstances, most men of fifty, one imagines, would have made an exceptional effort to get in touch with possible fact, and if they had had to deal with warfare, abductions, and torture-chambers, would have made as light of them as possible; would, for instance, have diminished the personal prowess of their heroes, and the magniloquence of their abductors, and decently hurried over those passages in which they

meddled with hot iron. Another and less obvious method approved itself to a teller of tales as experienced as Scott. Far from shirking the natural difficulties of his subject, he invents minor incidents essentially boyish, and lingers over them with boyish delight. Richard, as we know him in history, too heroic a figure for prose fiction of an ordinary kind, appears in 'Ivanhoe' in as thunder-smiting a mood as that of Geraint, when in the 'Mabinogion' Enid drives before him the horses of twelve slaughtered knights: Front-de-Bœuf hurtles through the pages of the romance as magniloquence personified, and his creator catches the infection.

"'Seize him and strip him, slaves,' said the knight, 'and let the fathers of his race assist him if they can.'

"The assistants, taking their directions more from the Baron's eye and his hand than his tongue, once more stepped forward, laid hands on the unfortunate Isaac, plucked him up from the ground, and, holding him between them, waited the hard-hearted Baron's farther signal. The unhappy Jew eyed their countenances and that of Front-de-Bœuf, in hope of discovering some symptoms of relenting; but that of the Baron exhibited the same cold, half-sullen, half-sarcastic smile which had been the prelude to his cruelty; and the savage eyes of the Saracens, rolling gloomily under their dark brows, acquiring a yet more sinister expression by the whiteness of the circle which surrounds the pupil, evinced rather the secret

pleasure which they expected from the approaching scene, than any reluctance to be its directors or agents. The Jew then looked at the glowing furnace, over which he was presently to be stretched, and seeing no chance of his tormentors relenting, his resolution gave way."

'Ivanhoe' is full of such strained situations. If Rebecca is to have an interview with the Templar, she must have it on the dizzy edge of the battlements; if Robin Hood is to shoot, he must shoot better than William Tell; if Front-de-Bœuf's castle is to be burned, it must be burnt by the demented Ulrica; and if all is to end happily, the happy ending must be brought about by the mock funeral of Athelstane. But all this only goes to show with what zest Scott threw himself into his task, how anxious he was to bring everything into line, and how little deterred by any fears of improbability. A tale about the Crusades appear improbable! he would have said to the literary aspirant, only take care you make it improbable enough. And so he carries it off, begging the reader to excuse him for adding a little artistic heightening to events that might otherwise appear too matter-of-fact. He has no doubts himself, and, as we read on, compels us to feel ashamed of our incredulity, for after all if half-a-dozen of the incidents

could have happened so could all the rest. Who ever doubted the word of Scheherazade?

There are not many passages in 'Ivanhoe' that would seem natural if transferred to any of the more sedate of the Waverley Novels, yet there is one portion of the book which does not depend for its effect upon the genial exaggeration of the whole, that part, I mean, which deals with Rebecca and Rowena. The contrast between the two women is both striking and natural, and though they sometimes appear in forced situations, they are both drawn with a regard for a different kind of truth, from that which Scott had in his mind when he flung off his lively sketches of Richard and his Crusaders. It was a fortunate thought that induced him to contrast with his proud Saxon maid, his proud Jewess, since both in a sense are outcasts, though their circumstances have a different complexion. The position of Rowena, the daughter of a race though conquered, royal, ministers to her pride; Rebecca remains proud despite her position. The claims of the one, though considered fantastic, were respected by the Normans, as even in France to-day the most convinced republican pays some deference to the descend-

ants of the old *noblesse*, but the other could advance no claims that, proceeding from a Jewish usurer's child, would meet with anything but contempt. Rowena's pride consequently is always in evidence, and only put by when her heart is touched; Rebecca's can hardly have been suspected, and appears only at the important moments of her life. In their final meeting the contrast is brought out with great delicacy. The fault of both characters is that they are laboured. Even Rebecca, on whose creation Scott had excuse for priding himself, moves through his pages with a grand tragedy air that is not quite the manner of life. They are interesting chiefly as affording an example at once of his excellence and weakness as a painter of women. His attitude towards both is similar, with the delineation of both he took pains, and yet while the one is a portrait of great merit, the other comes near being a lay figure. To understand how it so happened, is to understand two things about Scott, which, as distinctive of a master of the novelist's art, are well worth notice: his high sense of the bearing of action upon character, and his consistent practice, whatever the liberties he allowed himself in dealing with

events, of putting into his novels people corresponding with those whom he saw.

That Scott was deficient in his knowledge of female character has been too often admitted by his sturdiest admirers as a kind of propitiatory sacrifice to those who cannot see, as they do, in each successive Waverley Novel a masterpiece of art ; even Mr. Hutton, one of the safest and most discriminating of his critics, is betrayed into saying, "Except Jeanie Deans and Madge Wildfire and perhaps Lucy Ashton, Scott's women are apt to be uninteresting, either pink and white toys, or hardish women of the world," and though the sentence is immediately after so qualified as to retain little value as a presentment of fact, it remains as a kind of gathering up of the general censure expressed. It may be doubted whether even as a censure it will not admit of being reduced, and whether Mr. Hutton is not prevented by what in Scott he terms natural chivalry from taking account of all that can be pleaded in justification.

To deal with the question generally, it will be granted at once, as indeed Mr. Hutton proceeds to grant, that the portraits of women of the peasant class in the Waverley Novels, of women

with a definite occupation, and who have the same or nearly the same chances of developing character as men in a corresponding rank in society, are unusually interesting. The waiting-women of Scotch nationality,—for an instance we may take Jenny Dennison in ‘Old Mortality,’—are painted, if with a little exaggeration, only with the exaggeration of truth, and to many critics it will appear that the delineator of Edie Ochiltree is to be seen in the delineator of Meg Dodds. Equally good are the female “characters,”¹ to use the word in its Scotch sense, the women, whatever their situation in life, like Mause, Meg Merrilees, and Lady Margaret Bellenden, who occur in such various guises and so often. All this and more Mr. Hutton grants, when he introduces still another exception in favour of some historical figures. But even among the ladies of middle rank there are some that cannot be cursorily dismissed, and there must be those who, while admitting that Scott’s

¹ “Men or women with some accentuated trait or traits of character, oddity of personal appearance, or style of talk, marking them off from the common herd of human kind, are those who are usually known as ‘characters,’”—‘Reminiscences of Innerleithen and Traquair,’ by Thomas Dobson.

method is not Thackeray's, find Diana Vernon quite as live a creature of fancy as the Amelia Sedley who so little repays analysis, Catherine Seyton as she whisks a vanishing skirt into the old house in the High Street something other than a pink and white toy, and Clara Mowbray, with her affected gaiety and mind perplexed, by no means a hardish woman of the world.

However, it can be no part of the duty of sane criticism to deny that Scott has in his extended gallery several portraits of ladies who are pink and white toys. Miss Wardour and Julia Mannering are two indisputable examples, if indeed Miss Wardour is not also one of a hardish woman of the world. Rose Bradwardine and Lucy Bertram have a good deal that is pink and white about them, and even Edith Bellenden might be so described by unkindly critics. There are others of course, but taking the five only as examples it will be noticed that the more interesting are those who are brought most in touch with events. Lucy Bertram, because she has more to disturb her, is more interesting than Julia Mannering, and so is Edith, since she finds herself placed in a situation of unusual interest. And this it is, I think, that will supply Scott's

justification. Character in the world in which we live is not only best displayed in action, but is often wholly dependent upon it for its development, and consequently it commonly happens that people who have nothing to do with action have very little character at all. In the periods of which Scott wrote, the number of Julia Mannerings and Miss Wardours must have been far from inconsiderable. To a "home-keeping" girl, to a woman living a guarded life, and hedged about from all the roughness of circumstance, the world must have been too colourless then, to provoke much response. Even to-day, when the opportunities of education are as open to one sex as to the other, that one can meet with Miss Mannerings, just as one can meet with young Lovels or Waverleys, is a fact too notorious for denial. The question is how far an artist is bound, if he deals with such "homekeeping" people, to make them interesting, to make more of them than Scott has troubled to make. Undoubtedly Miss Austen's Emma Woodhouse is interesting, and yet when the last page is turned her mind and soul are still negligible quantities. But how far is an artist bound to follow this method, nay, how far is it possible for

one who deals with great actions to do so? May it not be said that for a success of this kind there is necessary a pre-Raphaelite attention to detail, a concentration of interest on one point which is inconsistent with the artistic dictum that a picture must be seen as a whole? A painter who paints a wide expanse of mountain country must miss the petals of the flowers that dot his foreground, just as a painter who gazes at the petals will miss the outline of the hill. Emma is what she is, because Miss Austen looks at her through her hands, but Scott, whose view is on a wide field, sees Julia Mannering in her corner.

Nor is Thackeray's practice, when carefully considered, however different in manner from Scott's, inconsistent with this view of the limitations which on one hand or the other attach to the literary artist. Amelia, a passive figure, is made interesting, but it is at the expense of an amount of detail which to those unaccustomed to Thackeray's leisurely habit becomes tiresome. There are even critics to whom Laura and Mrs. Pendennis, women of no great attainments, but who contrive, without taking any considerable share in the plot, to capture our affections, seem dull. With all his power of analysis, Thackeray's

female characters who possess the most general attraction, Blanche, Becky, and Beatrix, are intertwined with whatever action there is in the novels where they occur. And even if the exception which Laura and Mrs. Pendennis constitute, be fully granted, the comparison is unfair. 'Pendennis' is a novel of still life in a sense in which none of Scott's novels are. Throughout almost the whole of them, irrespective of whether the interest of character or action predominates, there goes a breezy air of movement, a kind of flapping briskness that suggests a boat putting out to sea. If the world to which Scott introduces us is ample, there is also a noble amplitude in his manner, an amplitude that contains a hint, as far as it was possible for a prose artist to give it, of Shakespeare's own.

We have to turn to Shakespeare to learn how far it is possible for an artist whose world is even wider and more full of movement than Scott's, to make a female character interesting without the help of action or the encumbrance of undue detail. The heroines of the tragedies,¹

¹ Hermione and Hero may for the present be classed with the heroines of the tragedies, since they too, though occurring in comedies, are connected with a great action.

since necessarily connected with a great action, as also the merely farcical characters, since Scott's success with them is undisputed, may be put aside. And if we confine our attention to the comedies, and think of the ladies who there have interested us most, the names that come to the tip of the tongue are those of Portia, Rosalind, and Beatrice, all, it will be recognized, deriving a great part of their interest from the unusual situation in which they come to be placed. Portia and Rosalind go masquerading, and Beatrice is most herself when she befriends her cousin in the chapel. Throughout the comedies the general rule will be found good; almost all the ladies who especially interest us assume the habit or go through the experiences of men. Sylvia it is true does not, but Sylvia is a pink and white toy, and so indeed is Bianca: Celia and Nerissa do not, but neither is a centre of attraction: the ladies in 'Love's Labour's Lost' are but shadows, Olivia fades before Viola, and "sweet Anne Page" is a name. Perdita and Miranda are the only instances to the contrary that occur to the mind, and of these it is sufficient to remark that they are essentially poetical conceptions, perhaps the two most poetical

conceptions of "the supreme poetical power in our literature." It would be a preposterous demand to make of a novelist that he should attempt to rival such achievements, that wherever he has a Miss Wardour he should give us a Miranda, that he should do often in prose what Shakespeare at the top of his poetical genius does seldom. Shakespeare attempts it seldom, since qualities such as Miranda possesses—obedience perfect yet in no sense the offspring of a cowed individuality, sweet yet non-insistent dignity, sympathy all embracing, tenderness playful and consummately feminine—are best displayed and best understood in action, Desdemona being nothing else than a Miranda with a superb occasion.

The point to notice is not that Shakespeare has once or twice triumphed over difficulties quite too hard for Scott, but that he, too, where he has not action to help him, "has his pink and white toys." The difference is this, that in Shakespeare we do not notice their existence, since, they not being playthings for a poet, he has consistently neglected them or relegated them to the second place. The Anne Hathaways of the world, he would wish to tell us, with that light optimism which was so often his, do never

really marry the heroes, their business being but to dance at the weddings of the Rosalinds or Portias for whom poets pine. I confess that to me it seems that Scott in this matter has been more true at least to the truth of prose than Shakespeare has been. Looking out over the society about him, he found among his Dianas and Lucy Ashtons, and among the Perditas whom he could not paint, many a Miss Wardour and Miss Mannering, and these colourless characters by no means always to be neglected or playing second fiddle in the odd concert of human kind. To study them in detail was no part of his business, to have done so would have been to have interfered with his large plan of getting a world between the covers of a book, while to ignore them was for him as impossible as any other deviation from his constant habit of recording what he saw. Those who wish poetical truth, and it is of the higher service, may turn to Shakespeare, but those who wish to learn the plain matter of fact—not as to how the world goes, for Scott is often unreliable there, but about the people who compose it—will turn to the Waverley Novels. Where an author is salutary he is not always palatable.

CHAPTER IV

MISS AUSTEN

A MARSH dotted here and there with a deluding oasis, in which one stumbles, till a side step, taken perhaps from a lack of caution, perhaps by unavoidable chance, finally misleads, and one sinks, a bubble or two bearing witness to this sudden addition to the bog:—a road baked by a pitiless sun, up and down which dust-clouds are blown, obscuring the outline of a city too distant to convince the traveller that what he sees thus casually is not the product of fancy, part of the phantasmagoria of dreams:—a sea, subject to episodical storms across which, and beneath a sky often of a heavenly clearness, a small ship struggles pertinaciously to a port attainable by the master mariners:—these are conceptions easily distinguished, but the world takes shape according to the colour of the glass

through which we view it, and as our glass may have a thousand colours, so a thousand similitudes are necessary to represent its varying appearance. Between most of them there is this resemblance, that few are lightly favourable, for look past the world as men may, who is unaware of its blackness, or blind to its difficulty? "I have been studying," says Shakespeare's Richard, "how I may compare

"This prison, where I live, unto the world."

How admirably, exclaim the theologians, the place where human business is conducted puts the passions and emotions to the proof! and since it is from them if from any one that we should get a picture of rose, we shall not find elsewhere pronouncements more flattering. There is something at the back of the gayest appearing optimism which disguise does not hide. At bottom, our reflections on our position have a grave turn. We conceive the world as a marsh or a tumbling sea, rather than as a meadow, or a pool breaking on some occasion into trivial waves. Life, we are not in the habit of thinking of as a luxurious transportation from point to

point, or such a journey as a young lady will readily describe.

There have been women—it is written in the literary history of various countries—who have dealt successfully with life at large, but these are they who in their devotion to their story, their drama, or their novel have put aside conventional restrictions, and bid the standards of young ladyhood defiance. They are women who wish to be judged as authors, who ask of the public that it should neglect the sex of a serious writer, as readily as it neglects the age; they are not Miss Austens. Miss Austen—and it is at once her greatest limitation and her peculiar charm—said nothing that a lady might not say in a drawing-room, and spoke only of those matters which may be supposed to be dearer to women than to authoresses. Every one has heard the story of Congreve, who, when Voltaire came to see him, hoped that he might be visited as a gentleman rather than as a literary man, and every one has delighted in Voltaire's retort that one need not leave one's country to meet people with good manners. The excuse for Congreve's foppery is that the cant of authorship is disagreeable, and that a man of the world may reasonably

desire to be distinguished from those who are always either talking about their literary productions or priding themselves upon them. That portion of pardon which is granted to an author will be readily extended to an authoress. When Madame de Stael expressed a wish to meet the author of 'Pride and Prejudice,' Miss Austen characteristically replied that she would go nowhere under that title where she was not received as Jane Austen. It is difficult not to sympathize with her exaggerated sensibility. A male pedant is often tiresome, but a female pedant is often ridiculous, and about Miss Austen, who has moved so many to laughter, there was never anything ridiculous.

Still, a lady who writes books in this spirit runs the danger of not appreciating the seriousness of her business, a lady who considers herself as by nature a member of a protected class, and by accident or whim, an authoress, is not likely to sacrifice any conventions to her art. A young lady who persists in writing about the world as a young lady should, forces us back upon the question—how is a young lady to describe it? The truth is that the position of woman in letters is one of some difficulty. She is confronted on

the one hand with the custom that prescribes for the conversation of women an artificially selected range of subjects, and on the other with the custom of the great artists, prescribing an altogether different selection. If she writes as custom prescribes she will not speak of things of which the great artists are in the habit of speaking. If she writes as a great artist might, she will speak of many matters which are not discussed in drawing-rooms.

It was the fortune of Miss Austen, surely a genius of an altogether exceptional kind, who had no idea of writing anything which any one would be surprised to discover had been written by the daughter of a clergyman, not only to avoid artistic failure, but to achieve a highly remarkable artistic success, by a prompt recognition of the conditions under which she wrote. Many women there have been as anxious about the proprieties as ever she was, who have amused their leisure, or earned their bread by a swift succession of artistic failures: women who, though precluded by the fastidiousness of their temperaments, or the nicety of their circumstances, from speaking adequately of great subjects, have constantly attempted them. To men-

tion instances would be invidious, but every one has read novels written by women, fitted to shine, but not in literature, and dealing with the most tremendous matters, with the same primness one would expect in a nursery tale. Miss Austen, appreciating the conditions in which she was placed, and giving the rein to her impulse, fell into no such error. Not only does she not speak of the world, she makes no pretence of speaking of it. She knew her province, and in her province she achieved, at least so we must think till another Miss Austen gives us evidence to the contrary, all that was humanly possible.

Her life is a short story. She was the daughter of George Austen, a handsome and scholarly, but in no way exceptionally distinguished clergyman, who in those days of happy pluralists, had almost as of course, his two livings, his horses, his relations better off in the world's goods, and his circle of friends, some of the middle, some of the upper class, but all equally welcome at his Horatian rectory, where indigence and luxury were equally unknown. Her mother was Cassandra Leigh, a lady of the same position as her father, trained to the same habits of thought, and coming from a family with good sense and good

brains. Miss Austen was the youngest of seven children, five boys, and two girls. Of the boys, the eldest became an occasional writer, the second was adopted by a wealthy relative, the third became a clergyman, and the fourth and fifth, entering the Navy, reached the degree of Admiral. Her sister Cassandra, her senior by three years, became her devoted confidante. "Cassandra's," says Mr. Goldwin Smith, "was the calmer disposition with less seriousness ; Cassandra, it used to be said in the family, had the merit of having her temper always under command ; but Jane had the happiness of possessing a temper that never required to be commanded." Born on December 16, 1775, Miss Austen spent the first twenty-five years of her life at Steventon. Thence, her father growing old, and resigning the cares of his office to his son, she proceeded to Bath, where the family remained till some little time after his death. Her mother with her two daughters then took up her residence at Southampton, from which place the three removed in 1809 to a cottage offered them by the brother who had been adopted by their relative, and in proximity to his place at Chawton near Winchester. In this cottage the mother,

now old, and the two attendant daughters remained for the rest of Miss Austen's active life. In 1817 she was transported to lodgings in Winchester for the sake of constant medical advice. She had been ill for some time, and did not long survive her change of residence. Towards the end of July in that year her family followed her body to the grave.

For all practical purposes the periods spent at Bath and Southampton were unproductive. At Steventon, in the last five years, three novels were written, and at Chawton in five years, three more. For ten years Miss Austen observed quietly, for ten years she wrote quietly and deliberately, and, during the forty-two years of existence which she obtained, nothing, as far as we know, happened to her which was not decorous and quiet. Her life passed in a round of simple duties and enjoyments. For her neighbours as well as for herself there was a plethora of fireside delights and homely aspirations. Born and bred among people of the literary middle class, all interested in believing the habits to which they conformed, the moral rules they obeyed, the religion they professed, to be by some stroke of patriotic

fate the best possible, and all, as a matter of fact, without hesitation believing this, she was surrounded by an atmosphere, if not of reasoned, at least of secure doctrine. It was a secure England on which the news of the French Revolution burst, and it took some time to rob it of its security. Always open to the influence of convention, the professional classes were not likely to be the first to break away. Undistinguished and yet not unknown, their members have everything to lose by challenging the general opinion. They have not the "coign of vantage" of a public character, or the plain obscurity of a mechanic; in custom they are rooted, custom provides for them, and why should they quarrel with societies where they find their comfortable niche? Add to this that Miss Austen was not the friend of Erskine or the acquaintance of Mackintosh, but the demure daughter of a country vicar, and we get a notion of the ideas with which she would come in contact. I suppose there seldom existed a more conventional society than that which was to be found in the vicarages of England about the beginning of this century. The influences

which surround an Established Church are continually making for lethargy, and a hundred years ago they had uninterrupted sway. The Pope had long ceased to be a present fear, and the preacher who had thundered on the terrors of the Papacy would have thundered to nodding benches. The first fury of the Revolution had spent itself, and even had it not, the feast of Reason had never been set out before the doors of a Hampshire parsonage. "If Dr. Grant feared anything," says Mr. Goldwin Smith, summing up the matter in a sentence, "it was that the green goose would fail to appear on table after evening service, not that the Goddess of Reason would be enthroned on his communion-table, or eject him from his living." The Oxford movement emphasizing the claims of Catholics; the progress of the critical spirit, the fruit of Protestant inquiry, with the consequent lightening of a load of encumbering tradition; all this, with its wide effect on the Church, lay hid in the unimagined future. Constitutionally lethargic, the English rural clergy preached drowsily to drowsy hearers from the text "Whatever is, is right."

Their daughters, for in those days the duti-

fulness of daughters was an accepted fact, presumed not to contradict them. Some, such as Miss Austen, must have known, but would perhaps have been shocked to hear, as they certainly would not have said, that virtue consisted not in obedience to any formulae, but in an inclination of the mind, and that every civilization with its set course for propriety is but the arrangement that seems best at the time. Others, and they were the great majority, had not arrived at this conception. The reader of Erskine's speeches is struck with the few occasions on which that admirable advocate bases his argument on the true ground for tolerance, the fallibility of opinion, an idea existing in the highly conventional society he addressed, that to say openly that anything was a convention was as much as to say that it was bad. "Angels and ministers of grace" defended the social philosophy of Lord Eldon; Church, King, Lords and Commons, marriage and property, these were institutions as they existed, to wish any of which "mended or ended" was a mark of impiety. To dispute with orthodoxy about religion was, to borrow the simile of Dr. Johnson, like putting a pistol at a man's head, as

if any one had a vested interest in a serious opinion, as if it were not the business of every one, by taking thought, to arrive as near as for him is possible at the truth of the discussion.

It is true that we have not yet any reason to plume ourselves on our attitude towards open inquiry. About everything considered essential the mass of the public in 1897 believes itself to be as indisputably right as Miss Austen's public believed itself in her time. The work of the independent thinker, where his powerlessness does not protect him, has always been done amid the babel of awakened prejudice: Dr. Pangloss is a phenomenon by no means extinct, and it is only in 'Candide' that he has not a temper. For all that, to-day another attitude is in the air. We have moved so fast of late that it is difficult to believe there is any finality in our present ideas, or that we shall not need to borrow from the future and the past to correct them. Everywhere there are men, and those not merely among the educated few, who have come to realize that it is necessary to listen, and that while something may be gained by argument, nothing can be done by quiescence.

We appear to be approaching that far-off epoch, how far off those best acquainted with the social history of the last thirty years and its pitiless acrimonies may form some conception, when heat in the conduct of any serious discussion will seem as impertinent as it does now in the field of scientific inquiry. Certain it is, that if we ever reach it,—and millenniums do not hurry,—we shall have reached a society in temperament the antithesis of that in which Miss Austen lived, when the ability or worth of a citizen was measured by the amount of approval granted to his opinions. Opinions then were luxuries to be looked on with suspicion. What need had any one for them, when there was a multitude sufficiently acquainted with the truth about everything? This guardianship of the majority extended itself to trifles. If a youth saw no harm in Sunday travelling, he might miss the hand of Anne Elliot. If Miss Crawford smiled at country parsons she offended her suitor. If any one chose to be a Radical, he was promptly visited with the penalty of exclusion from the delightful pages of Miss Austen.

This was the atmosphere in which she grew up, an atmosphere moreover which there is no

reason to suppose was uncongenial to her. This was the society in which she lived perfectly happily, and against which, there is abundant evidence in any one of her books, she never for a moment rebelled. To have, as she phrased it, good principles, to accept the views of other people, to drink tea, and to talk a deal of harmless gossip, this was the sum and end of human perfection. To marry, well, if possible,—that is, if consistent with love,—but in any case to marry, this was the sum and “end of every man’s desire.” An authoress with such a gospel, or an authoress at heart entirely heedless of any other gospel than this, will assuredly not go a great length. An adequate conception of human society which, like a poplar tree, in the bulk remains stable while the separate leaves are in a state of unending agitation, she cannot have. The relation of the individual to that congeries of individuals which we call the world, and the resultant comedy, the vagaries of never-dying passion, the alternations of desire, and the general movement of ambitious dust, of this she can have no appreciation. “A mad world, my masters,” says Shakespeare, as he opens his volume of plays; “a various world,”

says Scott, as he invites us to the large feast he has prepared. But how was Miss Austen to depict it? The people among whom she moved were far from various or mad, on the contrary, they were monotonously sane; their sanity was surprising. The great world—the world in which Byron, Goethe, Napoleon moved—lay beyond her little circle; to speak of it adequately she would have had to travel far from her friends, far from home; to enter into its meaning she would have had to do violence to herself. Milton, said Dr. Johnson, was a genius that could cut a Colossus from a rock, but could not carve heads upon cherry-stones, a remark, the sense of which we are better able to appreciate when detached from its amazing context; but however untrue of Milton with the application to his sonnets which Johnson intended, it is a saying that needs only to be reversed to be true of Miss Austen. She indeed was a genius that could carve heads upon cherry-stones, but was constitutionally incapable of cutting a Colossus from a rock—and to know this was her signal felicity. Only once in the concluding chapters of 'Mansfield Park,' does she trespass into a domain too

high for her, and there the trespass is but slight.

Such an account of an authoress may not appear appetizing, but in those things we are apt to judge theoretically from too high a theoretical standpoint. Few of us take the trouble to chronicle the foibles of our neighbours, but as a matter of fact each of us derives much amusement from observing them. If we can imagine that by some magical process all our sensations and thoughts, evoked during a round of visits, dances, and dinners, were put down on paper, we can also imagine, I presume, that their perusal would be of interest. They interested us at the time, why should they not afterwards interest others? How much more interesting the record of the thoughts of a woman with extraordinary insight into the niceties of character, and with a charming, and even unique power of gently satirical comment! If this were all Miss Austen's novels were, they would still be read by maids. But Miss Austen in her novels, in those sparkling commentaries on a dull society, has done ever so much more than the mere chronicling of her impressions. In the first place she presents us with a story,

which though in her later novels a little long-winded, is always of sufficient interest to keep the attention. In the second place she arranges her *dramatis personae* with an unerring eye for effect, contrasting for instance Mr. Bennet with his wife, or Fanny Price with Mary Crawford. In the third place she draws largely on a fertile and always credible invention, and is constantly elevating a nonentity into an individual by the use of the nicest shades of caricature. In a word, she had, if we make allowance for her limited scope, every art of the novelist. To a great action alone she was indifferent. It is amazing to see how carefully she hurries over those passages which, in the course of her story, bring her near emotion and passion. In 'Sense and Sensibility,' where such an opportunity came nearly to her hand, she deliberately avoids it. The trivialities of daily life press forward, Willoughby's story is thrown into the background, and only narrated when it has become a piece of past history. "The passions are perfectly unknown to her," says Miss Brontë, "she rejects even a speaking acquaintance with that stormy sisterhood." It is so obvious that one is apt to forget its importance. An

authoress who does not touch these matters of which the great masters speak, cannot be ranked with them. A novelist of character who dispenses altogether with great action, with every action that is not trivial, can tell us little of weight about character. The best conjurers bring on the stage a whole world of accessories. Miss Austen takes a sheet of paper and quickly folds it into the likeness of a hundred things. To delight an audience with the manipulations of the paper modeller needs, no doubt, an unexampled deftness of hand, but to perform the Indian basket trick one wants also a boy and a basket.

To describe the delicate art of Miss Austen, "metaphor," says Mr. Goldwin Smith, "has been exhausted;" in minuteness of treatment she has been compared to the Dutch painters, in fineness of colour to the artist on ivory. Yet her work resembles that of the Dutch school of painting in nothing except its minuteness, her humour is not jovial, and the manners she describes seldom coarse. Like the miniaturist, her space is limited, but unlike the miniaturist, her method is not cramped by the smallness of the space. It was but a small part of life she saw, but she saw it

whole. Her figures are as large as life, but in life they are not large. From day to day she sat in her parlour, taking note of everything that passed; watching, at first with saucy delight, and also with occasional sensibility; watching, in her later days with an added tenderness, but also with an added propriety, and perhaps just a touch of bitterness, the trivial panorama that unwound before her. With an authoress of Miss Austen's stamp criticism is soon exhausted. Her works, unlike those of authors of wider range, give no opening for the eccentricities of private judgment, and such distinctions as exist among them are of necessity fine. The likeness between 'Sense and Sensibility' and 'Mansfield Park' is far more obvious than the difference, and there is an appearance of freak in laying emphasis on what needs to be suggested to be seen. Yet to grasp the distinction and to see in what it consists is to get a clearer idea of Miss Austen's general capacity, as it is also to appreciate in detail to what kind of excellence a writer with her interests is limited, and by what means she may please.

At Steventon three books were written—'Pride and Prejudice,' 'Sense and Sensibility,' and

‘Northanger Abbey;’ ten years later, at Chawton, three more—‘Mansfield Park,’ ‘Emma,’ and ‘Persuasion.’ It will be convenient to glance at them in their order, though the order itself is a little confused. The first step towards the composition of any of Miss Austen’s masterpieces was taken with a rough sketch of ‘Sense and Sensibility.’ Thereafter she struck off the first sketch of ‘Pride and Prejudice,’ revised ‘Sense and Sensibility,’ and then wrote ‘Northanger Abbey,’ which was also the first of the three to leave her hand. This was in 1803, but ‘Sense and Sensibility’ and ‘Pride and Prejudice’ did not receive their final touches till about ten years later. ‘Northanger Abbey’ may thus be taken as showing most clearly the traces of ‘prentice work,’ ‘Sense and Sensibility’ and ‘Pride and Prejudice’ as together the fine flower of the first period. Viewed in this light ‘Northanger Abbey’ acquires a new interest, for though speaking literally it was not a precocious production, Miss Austen, in 1803, being twenty-eight, there is reason to suppose that no alterations more than verbal were made on the copy completed five years before. The actual plot, we know, was concocted later than those of the

other two books of this period; but in them even the incidents may, as the years passed, have been subjected to some slight change. It is a matter of little consequence, as the plot of 'Northanger Abbey' is of little account. Intended partly as a skit on Mrs. Radcliffe's romances, the book is furnished with a story intentionally weak. What is of importance is the treatment, and here we are on safe ground in concluding that Miss Austen, in her first production, had not quite found her manner. The book is short, and yet it is not innocent of tedium. Its great success, a patient study of a girl with a colourless character, though a triumph of miniature art, does not catch the fancy. In the centre of a novel one looks for life, nor is there enough in the other characters to give to the book a lively air. Whatever action there is, is devoted to the elucidation of the character of the heroine; such other personages as occur are, contrary to Miss Austen's later habit, character-sketches. We have to take them as they first appear, with the consequence that they are either faint or a trifle over-coloured, wanting perhaps that vivacity which is essential even to the lightest caricatures. Miss Tilney is a shadow, and Mrs. Allen might

have been made more of. General Tilney is a character whom it is not easy to understand; if he is meant as a Radcliffian parody, the parody is not incisive; if he is meant as an actual person, he is but a half-hearted performer in the part of heavy father. Henry Tilney, his son, who talks at large, and is intended to be clever and serious and good, conveys the impression of being a little conceited, and something of a prig. The comic personages are undeniably amusing, but their attitude is fixed. Young Thorpe provokes laughter, not altogether without arousing the suspicion that he is there to be laughed at. Isabella, his sister, a more active figure, comes nearer, though even she misses complete success. Throughout the book Miss Austen gives the impression of hesitating between two attitudes, and while in the end she generally maintains that divided one which was to become habitual, it is not clear whether her real intention was to be gayer or less gay than she appears. Parts of 'Northanger Abbey' are quite solemn, there being no obvious call for solemnity, parts are written in a spirit of laughter, which does not somehow impress one as hearty, while here and there is a tendency to sententiousness. When

Henry Tilney cannot conveniently be utilized as an organ for the delivery of stock reflections, Miss Austen comes in her proper person to his aid. If we compare the novel with 'Pride and Prejudice' we see that what its authoress wanted was a more lively interest in her characters, and what she had to fear was the approach of seriousness: if we compare 'Pride and Prejudice' with it we see how soon she learnt to make her slight plots interesting by the enthusiasm with which she told her story, and to carry off any tendency to seriousness by the sparkling movements of her wit. 'Northanger Abbey,' like everything else Miss Austen wrote, has a charm of its own; its especial interest for the critic is due to its showing traces of the same manner which reappears in her later works. Her detail, for instance, she takes quite seriously, "painting her rose" with the same touch of almost laughable gravity which is observable in 'Mansfield Park.' In 'Pride and Prejudice' she is herself amused as the record of trivialities runs from her pen.

Than this last surely never was there a book written which has given more harmless pleasure to those who have come under its spell. As we

open its pages, we bid adieu to a world of sordid cares and troublesome interests, and though we do not wander into fairy-land, for Miss Austen's world is always matter-of-fact, we do catch a breath of an air less severe than that which we habitually draw, and find, if not fairy-land, at least a touch of the lightness of fairy-land brought down to us. Everything, strictly speaking, is a little out of life. Mrs. Bennet is a little too silly, Mr. Bennet a little too clever, the abduction a little too gay, Mary a little too funny, and Darcy too like the Prince of Dignity Castle. But while everything is heightened, nothing is heightened overmuch: the play of fancy, the constant and nimble satire, lend a light not its own to the humdrum society described. Still, the society is there, the picture is as accurate as could be drawn by a woman full of girlish freshness and mature wisdom suddenly turned arch. Indeed it is difficult to know what to praise most in this delightful book, its essential truth, or that touch which takes clean away from it anything of the sordidness inseparable from the plain presentation of fact. Here are all those people: the foolish, scheming mother, the witty and not unselfish father; the girls, sensible,



beautiful, giddy; the bucks so preposterously dandified; the inanely pompous vicar, the bowing mayor—just as they lived, and yet not just such: speaking, let us say, in their natural voices, dressed in their usual clothes, but moving to a music a little brisker than any to which in their real lives they had made pretence of keeping time.

How is this miracle in miniature effected? By no breach of the laws which govern the artistic world. There is as much activity in 'Pride and Prejudice' as there is in 'Ivanhoe.' The incidents are small, but they are constant, and each does its office. We look through the kinetoscope, and we see the maiden dancing as feately as those whose weight is something in stones. A breeze ruffles a pond, and the toy-boats are driven out to sea, or to harbour, buffeted as unceremoniously as a ship on the Atlantic. There was not an infinite deal to be shown,—the delectable folly of a mother of five; it was enough that Mr. Collins should propose or Lydia be married,—the reproving wit of a man who has every excuse for being as witty as Miss Austen can make him; it was sufficient that in his household he should have had to reckon a

silly wife and three silly daughters,—the nature of an English girl, sensible, artless, debonnaire ; all that was wanted was a country town, a dearly-loved confidante, a dance, a sister's chill, a visit from the Blankshire regiment, a lover with supercilious airs, a chance meeting at Pemberley. Elizabeth Bennet tripping about her mother's white painted rooms is as real as Diana Vernon on the heath. With her, sunning in Miss Austen's humour, where is the reader who has not fallen in love? and though her heart does not beat sufficiently strongly to leave an ineffaceable impression on ours, we have only to renew our acquaintance to feel the old attraction. Lord Beaconsfield professed to have read 'Pride and Prejudice' seventeen times. One wonders no longer that a statesman who was so often in such company should have found himself on the side of the angels. This is the triumph which Miss Austen is always bringing off, and she brings it off because though her range is limited she is mistress of her range. Let the events be as unimportant, or even as in her later books as occasional as possible, not one is wasted. She has her eye always on her characters: Lady Middleton has a spoilt child; how would Lucy

Steele behave to it? Darcy writes a neat hand; what would Miss Bingley say? Willie Price is in want of pocket-money; what "considerable sum" would represent the beneficence of Mrs. Norris? These are the questions that interest her. A straw will show which way the wind blows if one holds it up to learn about the wind. Only on some days, and on them Miss Austen keeps indoors, the wind is so strong that the ground is clean swept of straws, and if one found one twirling in a corner, it would be snapped away before one could hold it up. She is the perfect master in little; in her own domain she has always the knowledge and resource of which Scott is so often heedless: the moment she steps out of it he leaves her standing.

'Sense and Sensibility,' a work of the same period, and subjected to the same process of revision as 'Pride and Prejudice,' is very similar in tone. Of the two novels it has been generally considered the inferior, perhaps because there is no Mr. Bennet or Mr. Collins, perhaps because there is Edward Ferrars, perhaps because Willoughby's record is darker than is wanted for drawing-room comedy, and his confession too noisy for a drawing-room. It is plain that the

contrasts are sharper, and the shades of character-drawing not so fine as in 'Pride and Prejudice,' Elinor being possibly too sensible, Marianne too much the food of enthusiasm, and Mrs. Jennings too boisterously amusing. Nevertheless 'Sense and Sensibility' comes in a good second to Miss Austen's masterpiece, and some, their judgments notwithstanding, it will charm as much. Of the two productions it is, on the whole, the younger; it wears more openly the "exulting outside look of youth," and had Miss Austen never depicted the character of Marianne her picture of English girlhood would have been too consistently sensible. Every woman is not as sane as Elinor, as judicious as Elizabeth, as proper as Fanny, as teachable as Emma. On the contrary, there are women, and those to be met with on other than rare occasions, whose passionate desires swamp their reason, who decide not by the head but by the heart, women who act as Marianne Dashwood acts, with the same generous candour, and the same confiding enthusiasm.

"At that moment," says Miss Austen, when Marianne recognizes in the ball-room the lover who had deserted her, "she first perceived him; and her whole countenance glowing with sudden delight, she would have moved

towards him instantly, had not her sister caught hold of her.

“‘Good heavens!’ she exclaimed, ‘he is there,—he is there!—oh, why does he not look at me? Why cannot I speak to him?’

“‘Pray, pray be composed,’ cried Elinor, ‘and do not betray what you feel to everybody present. Perhaps he has not observed you yet.’

“This, however, was more than she could believe herself; and to be composed at such a moment was not only beyond the reach of Marianne, it was beyond her wish. She sat in an agony of impatience which affected every feature.

“At last he turned round again and regarded them both; she started up, and pronouncing his name in a tone of affection, held out her hand to him. He approached; and addressing himself rather to Elinor than Marianne, as if wishing to avoid her eye, and determined not to observe her attitude, inquired, in a hurried manner, after Mrs. Dashwood, and asked how long they had been in town. Elinor was robbed of all presence of mind by such an address, and was unable to say a word. But the feelings of her sister were instantly expressed. Her face was crimsoned over, and she exclaimed, in a voice of the greatest emotion, ‘Good God, Willoughby, what is the meaning of this? Have you not received my letters? Will you not shake hands with me?’”

One seems here to catch a faint echo of those women who, springing from the pages of *Bandello* and *Boccaccio*, took form on the Elizabethan stage, that romantic feminine growth of Italy which is often found transplanted and

flowering in another clime. That Marianne's sensibility is exaggerated has been said often and with justice, but the effect of exaggeration is produced, not by the situation itself, which is only graver and not less natural than others in the novel, but by the length and monotony of its treatment. The distress of the character has always the same cause, and is always in evidence, whereas an artist who had had an instinct for serious action would have given some new turn to the events, and thus avoided the artificial effect of repetition. Miss Austen, whose art has been compared to photography, has some of the limitations of the photographer. A photograph of one mood is as true as the photograph of another, but a photograph of strong emotion will fail by its fixity to convey the impression of truth.

Another and infinitely different woman in 'Sense and Sensibility' will serve as an illustration of this. Like Marianne she appears always in character, but she never wearies. With a broadly comic figure there is not the same necessity to vary the mood. Laughter is effortless, and a reader will laugh three times over three different presentations of the same

"humour," where he will not sigh twice over the same heroics. Literary analysis is not always justified of its labour, and possibly literary analysis will not help us to decide why it is Mrs. Jennings obtains a firmer hold of our affections than any other of the female butts of Miss Austen's wit. It cannot be her rather senseless interest in matchmaking, for Mrs. Bennet is as a matchmaker quite as inveterate, and if it is her goodness of heart, why is it that Miss Bates does not elicit kinder feelings? It is less of a sacrifice to confer benefits on a bevy of beautiful young ladies than to tend the last helpless days of blind and stupid age. It may be that Mrs. Jennings' promiscuous benevolence does happen, in a degree unusual for promiscuous benevolence, to be of service to those whom she comes across. Her meddling does no harm, she is always in high spirits, in an exuberance of wealthy good-humour; we are sorry for "poor Miss Bates," but Mrs. Jennings' loud laugh is extremely infectious. Mr. and Mrs. Palmer, who dance attendance on her, have the same kind of merit in miniature. They are out of nature, of course, but then it is not likely that they were intended to be otherwise. They

come in just at those places where the narrative begins to drag, and the introduction of a couple of drolls is welcomed as a relief.

“‘You and I, Sir John,’ said Mrs. Jennings,” addressing her host across the dinner-table, “‘should not stand upon such ceremony.’

“‘Then you would be very ill-bred,’ cried Mr. Palmer.

“‘My love, you contradict everybody,’” said his wife, Mrs. Jennings’ daughter, with her usual laugh, “‘do you know that you are quite rude?’

“‘I did not know I contradicted anybody in calling your mother ill-bred——’”

A novelist must be full of vivacity before she condescends to farce so broad, but then ‘Sense and Sensibility’ and ‘Pride and Prejudice’ are the gay offsprings of youth.

Very different is the tone of ‘Mansfield Park,’ justly considered its author’s most finished production. But in reading we are conscious that half our wonder is gone. The result may be, and in some ways is, more considerable than anything achieved by the earlier efforts. In ‘Mansfield Park,’ Miss Austen’s art is seen in its most delicate form, her style is quieter, the effects she produces with it are even subtler than before. Nevertheless it is the mature fruit of a mature tree. What delights incomparably in

the books of the first period, is the union of girlish freshness, of youthful zest, with the admirable mental balance which only experience can give. "Is it possible," asks Mr. Jowett in his diary, "for youth to have the experience and observation and moderation of age, or for age to retain the force of youth?" Miss Austen's powers grew and deepened, but in her first books we find the sense and discrimination of her last, and it is this which taken together with their gaiety gives to them their peculiar charm. It is as if it were possible to be at once old and young, as if a girl were to go to a ball, dance it out, and enjoy everything as much as any one there, with the full unreflecting reception essential for perfect enjoyment, and yet immediately after see the matter with the eyes of one who had gone to judge of the characters. This union of youth and age then, of things hardly ever found together, gives a mark even more distinguishing than excellence to such a novel as 'Pride and Prejudice.' 'Mansfield Park' is altogether an old book, perfect perhaps if we leave out of account the melodrama of the conclusion, and the occasional flapping of an extremely white white choker, but

still old, with all its merit with none of the merit of youth.

'Pride and Prejudice' is gay, 'Mansfield Park' is almost sombre; in 'Pride and Prejudice' the minute touches are dashed in with laughing haste; in 'Mansfield Park' everything is laboriously minute; in 'Pride and Prejudice' there is a smile for every one, and every one deserves a smile; in 'Mansfield Park' Mrs. Norris is a character altogether repulsive, on whom sympathy would be wasted. A real figure enough this petty tyrant of a paltry sphere, but from 'Pride and Prejudice' one would not have learnt that Miss Austen had her acquaintance, or that of the set which surrounds her. Sir Thomas Bertram is of a genus extinct, Lady Bertram the most indolently selfish of stupid ladies, and Edmund Bertram with his "principles," his reputable and shallow judgments, the most exasperating of heroes, so exasperating that one thinks not once of the old saying that in the beginning there were three species, men, women, and curates. From these one turns with relief to find no relief in Julia and Maria, Thomas Bertram, Yates, and the "lady-killer" Crawford. But how delightedly one discovers among them

Mary Crawford and Fanny Price, the two most delicately-drawn figures in the whole of Miss Austen's delicate gallery. Nothing could be happier than their juxtaposition—the friendless Fanny doing in the plain innocence of her nature the offices of an universal friendship, and Mary fingering her harp in the seat of the parsonage window and weaving the spells of beauty and mirth. One is pleased too with the fitness of things that arranges for Cinderella having enough of the leaven of Cinderella in her to find in Edmund the fairy prince, and provides for the princess, a rather mundane one who thinks much of her lover's chance of a baronetcy, ultimately escaping him. One is pleased with the *dénouement*, however little with the means by which it is brought about. Mary's brother and Bertram's sister, who is married to a certain Mr. Rushworth, elope together, and the light comments and practical suggestions of Mary result in a final quarrel between her and her *fiancé*. The reader familiar with Miss Austen's earlier novels exclaims in mild astonishment when he is brought up by an incident of this texture, a violent departure from ordinary conduct, with neither passion nor seriousness to

explain it. It is true that occurrences of this kind have given opportunity not only to tragedians, but in 'Mansfield Park' the incident, narrated with the precision of a newspaper, brings us too near to the atmosphere of the divorce court, and Miss Austen's treatment of it to that of the Sunday-school. There is no serious medium, she would give us to understand, between talking extravagantly of sin, and treating such matters as of little account. "Let other pens dwell on guilt and misery," she concludes near the end of the book, "I quit such odious subjects as soon as I can, impatient to restore everybody, not greatly in fault themselves, to tolerable comfort, and to have done with all the rest." There must be a strange comfort in Pharisaism, else sympathy with the sect had not survived.

On the point of art it is clear that an action the extreme opposite of magnificent, must, to be justified, have an effect proportionate to its importance on the characters of the chief actors or spectators. What the incident emphasizes in 'Mansfield Park,'—that a woman so much of the world as Mary, and a man with so little knowledge of it as Edmund, were bound to drift

apart,—trifles had already shown. It was singular that Miss Austen, so wont to rely on trifles, should have concluded her tale in this fashion; and in her next production, as if sensible that she had dealt with matters unsuited to the style with which she charmed, she turned to a lighter theme. In 'Emma' there is nothing more serious than a secret engagement, with the consequence that we are once more free to be innocently amused with her intimate knowledge of the intricacies of character and the resources of a humorous situation. The book is distinguished by the same excellences, if also by the same defects, arising from limitation of view, which were observable in former productions. Mr. Woodhouse, the comic male figure, a perfectly true portrait, if we allow ever so little for conscious and humorous exaggeration, reminds us of the work of her youth; Mr. Knightley, with more than a suspicion of sententiousness, but with sense enough to carry it off, of many of her heroes; and Mr. Elton of her numerous farcical sketches. The mere story, though less inclined to drag than that of 'Mansfield Park,' is not quite so interesting as usual, but the mere story, again as usual, is of practi-

cally no consequence : every page is the result of quiet observation, of acute study of the motives which govern ordinary conduct. Miss Bates, at first reading, and, till one knows the plot, a little tedious, becomes better at every perusal, and I think the passage of years may be noted in the fact that in one of her last books Miss Austen selects as her female butt a character whom we feel under some necessity to pity. Her humour, which in 'Mansfield Park' had given place to a more serious wit, breaks out again everywhere. Less gay than in 'Pride and Prejudice,' it is as irresistible and often more mellow. We forgive Mr. Woodhouse for his iterated reference to Perry, take Emma's solitary sally on Miss Bates' loquacity quite seriously, and seriously wish it unsaid. There can be no question of an artist's power to deceive when one becomes scrupulous that an imaginary old lady should not receive momentary offence. But there never was any question as to the actual life of the chief characters in this book. Emma, who is said to be pretty, but who has nothing else remarkable about her—and that is not remarkable with Miss Austen's heroines—who is not particularly clever, and who rarely

comes near emotion, not only interests but charms. She is young, and has the charm of youth; she is active, and has the charm of activity; she is alive, and has the charm of life. It is not quite certain indeed,—there must occasionally be a doubt with an authoress occasionally so impersonal,—whether Miss Austen, her ideas not being ours, was as much affronted as her modern readers at the essential littleness of Emma's first appearance; but to entertain the suspicion is the province of a grudging criticism, and certainly there is not a line in the portrait which does not add to its truth. To live in a villa, with a nicely-ordered lawn in front of the parlour-windows, and a dozen or so trees scattered over the enclosed acre or two through which the drive ceremoniously winds, and this villa playing the part of manor-house for the neighbouring village, must be a trial for any one. Emma Woodhouse, by no manner of means a great lady, unaccustomed to mingle in society where great ladies find their like, meeting no one than whom she was not taller by an inch, must necessarily have thought something of her position. Outside the village she knew it was not great, inside she felt it to be magnificent: what was

there to prevent her from feeling those influences which tug at the hearts of those whom a great and careless novelist has swept into the large basket labelled "snobs"? But how pretty is her gradual emancipation from the necessary result of her surroundings, what a good wife she must have made for Knightley, and how often her glowing smile must have sealed the nascent lecture within his lips! No doubt, like all Miss Austen's later heroines, she would recognize, when her fit of gaiety was over, how eminently proper it was that her husband should have felt the desire to reprove: no doubt in the solitude of her chamber, she would amuse herself with her prim little moralizings, and think over and over again that "she had never been more sensible of Mr. Knightley's high superiority of character."

The truth is that the continued study of an artificial and trivial society has its effect upon the mind, and we must put up ungrudgingly, for the flood of humorous and sage comment amid which we find such flotsam and jetsam, with those prim little moralizings of Miss Austen's later years. The judgment of a writer whose field of vision no large interests cross, is bound

to become stereotyped, and even in 'Persuasion,' the novel of the six which Miss Martineau put first, there is a number of little things we could do without, the 'unamusing folly of Sir Walter Elliot, the precisian tone with which the authoress views the selfishness of Elizabeth and the Sunday travelling of her cousin, and the queer indifference, impossible for a robust morality, with which Anne views the shifty dealing of Mrs. Smith. A nature strengthened by the contemplation of great events could hardly, one thinks, have expressed itself thus, and yet how much sweetness and breadth of view was necessary to tell in just Miss Austen's way the beautiful love story of Wentworth and Anne. We forget the primness of many of her reflections, as we listen to those sentences with which charm is inextricably blended, and which seem to speak of a longing on the part of their writer for a different air. We forget them, as we come across again and again such passages as this, bringing a light tenderness and a beautiful innocent gaiety among the streets and into the rooms where dust and habit settle.

"Prettier musings of high wrought love and eternal constancy could never have passed along the streets of

Bath, than Anne was sporting with from Camden Place to Westgate Buildings. It was almost enough to spread purification and perfume all the way."

Camden Place to Westgate Buildings, we repeat to ourselves, how frank the recognition of the plaster and lime amid which now-a-days Cupid has to discharge his shafts, how like a sparrow's pipe in a city setting off the absurdity of man's elaborate arrangements.

This is not the tone of 'Pride and Prejudice,' and perhaps it would not be too much to say, if weight were to be given to fine distinctions, that each of Miss Austen's novels has a flavour of its own. But to say so is only serviceable if we keep in mind their essential similarity. It is no part of praise to hide what every one, given an account of her method, would suspect, and what every one reading her novels must see. "It is marvellous," says Mr. Goldwin Smith, "that Jane Austen's range being so narrow she should have been able to produce such variety. But narrow we must remember her range was, and recurrences or partial recurrences of the same characters and incidents are the consequence. We cannot help seeing the likeness between Henry Tilney and Edmund Bertram, while Edward

Ferrars is a feeble germ of both. We have several pairs of sisters, and sisterly affection is a constant theme. There is a close resemblance between Wickham and Willoughby, and a considerable resemblance between both of them and Henry Crawford." The instances might be multiplied indefinitely. Much of the fun of 'Pride and Prejudice' depends on the vulgar matchmaking of Mrs. Bennet, much of the fun of 'Sense and Sensibility' on that of Mrs. Jennings. Marianne is in love with Willoughby, Emma fancies herself in love with Frank Churchill: both are carried off in the end by elderly suitors who have been on the stage for a considerable time. In 'Pride and Prejudice' the heroine is proposed to by the wrong man, a similar fate befalls the heroines of 'Emma' and 'Mansfield Park.' All in the end make brilliant matches. In 'Sense and Sensibility' Edward Ferrars believes Elinor to be in love with Colonel Barton, in 'Persuasion' Captain Wentworth believes Anne Elliot to be in love with her cousin. Edward is fortunately saved from an entanglement with Lucy Steele, Wentworth is saved equally fortunately from the consequence of an entanglement with Louisa Musgrove. In all the novels

there is a great house forming in some way, whether for purposes of description or match-making, the centre of attraction,—in 'Pride and Prejudice' Bingley's, in 'Sense and Sensibility' Sir John Middleton's, in 'Northanger Abbey' General Tilney's, in 'Mansfield Park' Sir Thomas Bertram's, in 'Emma' Mr. Knightley's, in 'Persuasion' the Musgroves'. Even where there is the broadest distinction between the characters, there is, as in the cases of Mr. Collins and Mr. Elton, occasional similarity in their treatment. Both are clergymen, both for different reasons are ridiculous, both make absurd proposals, both are promptly rejected, both find immediate solace in another quarter, and the married life of both affords Miss Austen opportunity for some of her sagest satire.

All this not only may but must be admitted, yet with all this there is a singular diversity, an absence of exact repetition which is truly remarkable. The distinction is a shade, but the shade is almost always there. Undeniable as is the resemblance between Wickham, Willoughby, and Henry Crawford, they are all distinct; Wickham has not the dash of Willoughby, he is a fainter, less generous, and far more consistently

selfish character. Henry Crawford is both like and unlike them, for Henry Crawford has brains. "Henry Tilney," says Mr. Goldwin Smith, criticizing Macaulay's criticism, "shines more in small talk than Edmund Bertram, and his figure catches some of the special liveliness which pervades the travesty, but otherwise the two characters might be transposed without injury to either novel." It is folly to dogmatize about imaginary characters, but there must be some who will dissent from this judgment. Catherine Morland would not have attracted Bertram, and Henry Tilney would have married Miss Crawford. Mrs. Bennet and Mrs. Jennings are as broadly distinguished from each other, as both from Miss Bates. Marianne's love for Willoughby is different in kind from that of Emma for young Churchill. Knightley and Colonel Barton, the fortunate suitors, are not in the least like. The men of fashion, Darcy, Bingley, and Frank Churchill, are as different from each other as men of fashion can be. Edward Ferrars' entanglement with Lucy Steele is not creditable. Wentworth's engagement to Louisa Musgrove was a wholly innocent mistake. Elizabeth Bennet is no more like Mari-

anne, than Marianne is like Emma. Mary Crawford, Fanny Price, Catherine Morland, and Anne Elliot are all individuals. The incidents rather than the characters are repeated, and they are repeated with a difference. To a sight sufficiently keen, even among summer flies there are no "heads without name," and as one thinks of the array of nicely distinguished figures, going through the same unpretending round of pleasures and anxieties, which Miss Austen has scattered over her pages, one exclaims in astonishment—what diversity, what likeness, amid such sameness how much variety! As one thinks of them one can find it in one's heart to forgive those critics who have not been able to refrain from introducing the names of Shakespeare and Scott. But in reality, and for any purpose of service, no comparisons could be more misleading. Scott's world, being a world of prose, is distinct from Shakespeare's world, emphatically a world of poetry. But both have a world to deal with, both are capable of creating, both are continually creating people, who, if they were vivified, would not have the least understanding of each other. What does Meg Merrilees know of Lucy Ashton, or Falstaff of Lear! In Miss

Austen's society all the members are on calling or bowing acquaintance. Anne Elliot would have found fault with Mrs. Bennet's manners, but she might easily have passed an hour in the same drawing-room. Had Elizabeth taken advantage of Mr. Bennet's remark—"If any young men come for Mary or Kitty, send them in, for I am quite at leisure,"—and dispatched Captain Wentworth to him, he could not have been dissatisfied. True, not Shakespeare himself could have done more with the society Miss Austen saw than she has done : her achievement, given her materials, is as remarkable as anything in the world. A daisy is as remarkable as a Victoria Regia, but to say so is not to institute a comparison. If critics learn, as there is danger of their learning, to speak of Shakespeare and Miss Austen, it will be odd if some one with a sense of proportion is not provoked to retort—Shakespeare and five-o'clock tea.

The marvel is that the place of a writer whose range and view were as limited, and whose philosophy was as plainly empirical as Miss Austen's, should be as undisputed as Shakespeare's. We pay to her as ungrudgingly the respect which is her due. While Shakespeare thunders and

lightens to our continual amazement, and Scott surprises admiration with his mass of generous work, Miss Austen insinuates herself into our affections. Picking her way delicately, she moves at her best with the gayest heart. Whether she is depicting an Elizabeth or a Mary Bennet, she sings at her task: an April sun shines on the desired and the undesired. All is light, clean, courtly, and everything she says is interesting because she says it. Johnson, speaking in one of his most dignified passages of Garrick's death, refers to it as an event that had impoverished the public stock of harmless pleasure, and Miss Austen's glory is similar. Like Garrick, she has increased the gaiety of her nation. This, it seems to me, is what is to be said of her; the first feeling one has when one closes one of her novels is gratitude to the author who has pleased so much. Doubtless she does more than arouse pleasurable sensations, she does more than cajole the reader into good temper with himself. Every one who pleases us justly must do more while he pleases; he must waken our judgment, he must excite our fancy, he must appeal, if it is only on occasion, to our emotions. All this we find, and could

not avoid finding, accomplished in 'Pride and Prejudice,' or 'Mansfield Park,' and besides this, as Miss Austen's admirers will tell us, we are presented with an interesting comment upon the social history of the times. For all that, we think of these things with an effort, and when we ask ourselves what Miss Austen has done for us, we must reply, if our answer is to be candid—She has produced delight.

Her singularity is not that she has done this, but that in our judgment of her we think of it first. The effect of every considerable author must be something similar, he must please or he will not be read. To increase our knowledge of life, to enlarge our sympathies, to teach us, as Wordsworth's claim runs, "to see, to think, and to feel," is in a very real sense to increase our happiness. Only with any author of weight we think of a hundred things before we think of this; our debt to him is so large, the benefits he has conferred so great that we think of them with scarce a thought for their inevitable result. With Miss Austen it is different: no critical analysis will reveal anything in her that is not summed up for good in the one word delightful, and no critical analysis can deprive her novels

of their right to the adjective. To insist on her separate excellences would be misleading ; they are many, but they are not the cause of her charm. If we consider her knowledge of character, and especially of feminine character, we shall see that her achievement even here would not of itself entitle her to a place of very high distinction. From the play of 'Othello' alone one learns six times more of what it is important to know about woman, than from the whole six of her novels. 'The Antiquary' tells us more of what is essential in human character than all she has left. If it is stated that she has enlarged our sympathies, it must be answered those only of people naturally sympathetic, and who are thus protected from the hardening effect of her constant stream of gentle cynicism. There is nothing in what she says to which on the score of cynicism objection can be taken. She does not over-emphasize the poor side of humanity. On the contrary, she seldom speaks of it with the severity it deserves, but she never allows us to lose sight of it. She has no ardours which induce her for a moment to forget exceptions, and if after reading 'Emma' a man naturally sympathetic will look more

charitably on the Miss Bates's of country towns, a spirit not "finely touched" will not be led by the perusal of her novels to "fine issues." Judged as those of a humane writer, the effect of her books is not great. For the purpose of expanding a cold or selfish nature, Thackeray's 'Roundabout Papers' have more potency than everything she wrote; it is doubtful if Marianne Dashwood herself would have found a tear for the sorrows of her fellow characters.

But it is useless to run over a catalogue of single virtues. Miss Austen is the mistress of a pretty school, she is not a master to whom any one would turn to learn about life. To proceed with her as we proceed with the great authors, by summing up in detail what has been done, would not be to establish but to minimize her excellence. To establish that we have to travel by another road; we have to start by stating what generally forms the conclusion of praise, and as to the justice of which as regards her there can be no possible doubt. There can be, it is necessary to insist on it, no possible doubt that she has contributed to our happiness, or rather those who praise Miss Austen can allow of no doubt about it, for unless the pro-

position be admitted at the outset their case is gone. Fortunately the proposition, when carefully considered, is one to which no one is likely to take exception. It does not imply that every one who reads her novels is necessarily delighted ; it cannot be expected to imply what would amount to a contradiction of fact. A maid-servant, for instance, will probably not indulge in any excessive hilarity at the inanity of Mrs. Bennet, or the preposterousness of Mr. Collins. The factory worker, the shop assistant, the soldier, the sailor, the marine, will concur in thinking Miss Austen dull ; as representatives of the classes to which they belong, they will miss the spice of "moving accidents;" a "milliner of Bath" will find little of interest in 'Northanger Abbey.' Miss Austen's appeal, it may be granted, is to a comparatively limited number, to a class sufficiently educated to perceive the fine shade of her distinctions, and to be pleased with stories not such as would be told by the mere teller of tales.

From this limited audience some deductions have to be made. There are some, not I think many, who, though competent, fail to appreciate her. Her peculiar, light, sarcastic comment on

almost everything that came into her range of vision, produces an irritating effect upon those who, while able to understand satire when dignified by anger, have no patience with her habit, of saying a trifle more than she means, and of sacrificing the strict letter of fact to her desire to excite the intelligence. Satire, at its best, is nothing else than angry truth, but she, when most satirical, is often but playing with ideas.

“Between Barton and Delaford,” she writes, concluding ‘Sense and Sensibility,’ “there was that constant communication which strong family affection would naturally dictate; and among the merits and the happiness of Elinor and Marianne, let it not be ranked as the least considerable, that, though sisters, and living almost within sight of each other, they could live without disagreement between themselves, or producing coolness between their husbands.” —

Those who take such passages seriously, and refuse to see that this is but the pinch of salt to allow the reader to find flavour at the end, are bound to be disappointed with them, to find in them something a little flippant, a little silly. Then again from that portion of the educated class which is left to her, from that portion, which, capable of seriousness, does not always choose to be serious, another deduction must be made.

Among young people, however cultivated, the majority will not be found her admirers. Her mundane view of affairs, her real interest in income, dress, manner, habit, position, alienates at once all those whose notions are youthfully romantic. Marianne is the only one of her characters who will be easily understood by youth, and her treatment of her will not seem, and perhaps it is well that it should not seem, to be right. The things which are admired in youth, are not those with which Miss Austen has concern. A young girl may be interested in dress, may be interested in the income or position of her lover, but this is in actual practice, and even in actual practice she will despise herself for doing so. Youth sees the large things in life, sees them too exclusively perhaps, and is apt to write nonsense about them, but still sees them, whereas it was at the little things that Miss Austen looked. There comes a time when it is tonic to see matters in proportion, but it does not come in the school-room; one has read a great number of books before one learns to value the social sense of the author of 'Pride and Prejudice.' On the composition of her public it is not necessary to say more, but it may be

suggested that the majority is male, educated women as a rule having a greater tendency to consistent seriousness than is compatible with a genuine love of intelligence at play. If it is so, and such remarks as have been made, and still more the quantity of remarks that have not been made, by her female critics go to show that so it is, it is an instance of the oddity of literary fates that woman's lightest painter, and certainly not her worst, should find the smaller portion of her audience among her own sex.

About the enthusiasm of that audience there is no question—an enthusiasm moreover which is reasoned and discriminating. Exaggerated claims are occasionally made for her work, but these are the freaks of of jaded critics, anxious possibly to say something new on an exhausted subject, amusing themselves perhaps, by setting out to prove a little more than they think capable of proof, or attempting to supply new justification for an admiration for which the old justification was sufficient. Such claims are not advanced by the bulk of her public. It is remarkable that, the admiration she excites being so great, so much discrimination should be shown by her admirers. Yet, so it is. Great is

the admiration she has excited, and great is the discrimination with which she is admired. The literary class, as a whole, is bound to have sobriety in its judgments, and Miss Austen's books are especially those to delight the literary class.

To the literary class—and the phrase will be understood to include many who have never printed a line—there is no virtue more attractive than that of style. If it is not true that every workman takes pleasure in doing his work well, at least he likes to see it well done. When Harry of Monmouth pays his tribute to the character of Hotspur, he praises him for doing excellently what he himself did. He had seen him, he says, “witching the world with noble horsemanship.” And as a rider loves a good rider in spite of every inducement to the contrary, so the dealers in phrases love one who turns her phrases with skill. The politician, the lawyer, the cleric, the author, all occupy their lives in some kind of talk, they depend for their effect upon their mastery of words; so also the member of any profession who aspires to distinction in it or in society, soon learns how much depends upon how he says a thing. There is

no educated man who is blind to the importance of the manner in which he delivers himself of his matter, to the importance of style. He may not play the game perfectly, but he will be delighted whenever he sees it perfectly played, a reflection uttered, a comment passed in the most fitting form possible. And here he will find that Miss Austen abundantly satisfies him. Her style does every justice to her matter, she excels in the beauty of her workmanship, in the fitness of her language, in the skill with which she clothes her thoughts in sentences turned without apparent effort, and faultlessly neat.

Her manner and method are as perfect; she knows exactly when she has said enough, where the reader may be safely left to supply the necessary comment; and she knows when it is essential that she should say something, where the aid of her sensitive intelligence is wanted. No one knew better how to introduce an incident. The arrival of Bingley in 'Pride and Prejudice' shows this side of her art in perfection. There everything is trifling, ordinary, commonplace. A young man pays a call, and the reader's attention is caught. To any incident, however innocent, Miss Austen possessed

the power of lending a transitory importance,
as she also possessed the much rarer power of
touching a grave incident so lightly as to bring
it into tone with its surroundings. 'Pride and Prejudice,' for example, is a story in which gravity would be out of place. The heroine's sister Lydia is a girl of sixteen or seventeen, and about the middle of the book a young scamp, by name Wickham, takes it into his head to run off with her. Put in plain English, in a novel dealing with the girlish loves of a family of girls, we find ourselves concerned with a story of abduction. Here was an opportunity for a moralist, and how few would have missed it; one trembles to think what might not have been said. In how many hands would 'Pride and Prejudice,' beginning as a comedy, have ended brightly? But Miss Austen means it to end so; she feels instinctively that the incident is not light enough for its surroundings, and she exhausts the resources of her art to reduce its importance. Lydia is giddy, she tells us that clearly; Wickham is an impudent scamp, she does not conceal his rascality, but she forces his impudence so delightfully to the front that we cannot choose but laugh. "I admire all my

three sons-in-law highly," says Mr. Bennet; and adds, "Wickham, perhaps, is my favourite." One sees the sense of this satire; and if Lydia's marriage to Wickham is only the "cobbling" of an awkward blunder, and we are a trifle surprised that the family should acquiesce in it as gaily as they do, we soon forget that in watching the absurd enthusiasm of Mrs. Bennet. This adventure of a couple of madcaps becomes ridiculous enough, and we find ourselves laughing at it without being able to reproach Miss Austen with the least indelicacy, the least fault in taste. What a charming humour, what fineness of handling was necessary before such a result could be achieved, and this is due to her manner, to her quick perception of the incongruous, to her power of saying what ought, and no more than what ought, to be said. It is a merit which endears her to those whose reading is extensive, and who are accustomed to find incidents mismanaged or run to death, the right thing not said, or not what is right in the particular place, and the wrong tone often perversely taken.

The good sense and good taste of Miss Austen are everywhere, and so everywhere is

her wit. Most people start life in an attitude of profound seriousness, with a strong individual outlook: "I have lost my rattle," cry the perpetually young, as if others were always thinking of its loss; and to discover that the world was not contrived for any person, or at all to favour vanity, is to take a stride in serviceable age. But the revulsion of feeling is often too sudden, and laughter is resorted to, for Byron's reason, that one "may not weep." There comes, of course, the final stage, in the quaint language of high-sounding philosophy, the reconciliation of opposites—a stage in which one is not violent on one side or the other, and sees the extravagance of excess. To have one's temper under command, and yet to feel the promptings of indignation, to be amused, and yet to appreciate that there is more in folly than laughter can adequately criticize, this is the usual mood of those to whom books and experience have taught something. It is a mood to be abandoned only on the pressure of some great occasion, and one which Miss Austen, who touches little on great occasions, exactly suits. *Castigat ridendo*; but we do not hear the crack of the whip, and her laugh at follies, which she knows will survive it, is not

very loud. There is a familiar story that a Chinaman and a chimney-sweep, meeting in Lincoln's Inn Fields, fell to laughing at each other so heartily as to endanger their health. Miss Austen will not join in their hilarity, she has seen many like them, and is aware that neither a Chinaman nor a chimney-sweep is ridiculous to himself. Nor do I think had she lived two centuries earlier and seen Jews parading in yellow, or the fires which the constant martyrs of England's versatile ecclesiasticism lit, she would have been loud in her disgust. Custom, she would say, if she had ever condescended to a generality, is firmly planted, let us be content where it is too serious for our smiles to let it pass.

Undoubtedly it was not a heroic attitude, it was not even an attitude which was likely to have much weight with the large bands of noisily honest people who control the modern world. Miss Austen hated avarice, and Molière has done infinitely more than she has to make avarice detestable. But for those who love the truth, who desire to see the thing as it is, to be grateful, in Mr. Kipling's phrase—and where shall we find franker phrases than Mr. Kipling's?

—to “the God of things as they are,” her attitude is the best. There are few Harpagons in existence. Harpagon as a type—splendid caricature though he is—is a caricature. Mr. and Mrs. John Dashwood walk the streets every day, and for all who take an artistic pleasure in hearing just what is true they are charming figures. There is a whole volume of instruction in the second chapter of ‘Sense and Sensibility.’ By his first marriage Mr. Henry Dashwood had a son, John Dashwood; and by his second two daughters. Towards the close of his life, when his children were grown up, he succeeded to a great estate, entailed strictly however, much to his chagrin, on his only son, who, by a “good” marriage and the fortune of settlements, had already far more money than his two sisters and their mother. The only hope of Mr. Henry Dashwood was that he would survive long enough to make provision out of the income for his widow and children.

“But the fortune, which had been so tardy in coming, was his only one twelvemonth. He survived his uncle no longer; and ten thousand pounds was all that remained for his widow and daughters. His son was sent for as soon as his

danger was known, and to him Mr. Dashwood recommended, with all the strength and urgency which illness could command, the interest of his mother-in-law and sisters."

In the furtherance of his dead father's wishes, Mr. John Dashwood, a man of six thousand a year, thinks "something must be done." At first his generosity extends to the idea of a free gift of a fiftieth part of his possessions, but declines on "neighbourly acts." The inimitable conversation, in the second chapter, which passes between him and his wife, in which his original proposal of three thousand pounds is reduced by the most natural steps to fifteen hundred, an annuity of a hundred, an occasional *douceur* of fifty, and finally to presents of fish and game "whenever they are in season," with the running fire of "to be sures," and "certainly nots," and the general atmosphere of virtuous concern, is as admirable a piece of irony as is to be found in the language. What could be finer than Mrs. John Dashwood's discovery that it was "the more unkind" of her father to saddle her mother with the payment of an annuity to some old servants, "because otherwise the money would have been entirely at her mother's disposal," or

that their own child had the more exclusive claim on their fortune because he was an only one? Making allowance for that slight heightening which is necessary for art, there is nothing in the whole of the passage which could not have passed any day between a rich man and his wife on the subject of their poor relations. And the charming thing about Miss Austen is that she leaves the matter here. Mr. and Mrs. John Dashwood are mean paltry people, and whenever we catch a momentary glimpse of them, we find them just the same, but with none of their vices exaggerated, and with none of their decent behaviour forgotten. Some authors, when they have to deal with such people, can never have done with them; in their hands they become misers pure and simple, they plunge into a career of blackness. A bad heart, they seem to wish to tell us, leads to all manner of badness; but does it—does it not happen otherwise as often as not? Dashwood is pleased to hear of any good fortune falling the way of his sisters, he has a windy sympathy for people in misfortune in no way connected with him, as a husband and a father he behaves with propriety. How much meanness is there in the

world which results in nothing worse than the negation of good, how pitiful are the characters of many who come to respected ends!

A study of manners, however fleeting, will go sometimes below the surface, and a novelist of character as clear-sighted and as truthful as Miss Austen has, like every traveller, however circumscribed the area of his journey, "a tale to tell." It is as easy to under-rate her service as it is to overvalue it. She "sweeps a room," but she performs her task so deftly and with such bright-eyed diligence that she makes "the action fine." On the other hand her achievement appears greater than it is, because in the nature of things it is insusceptible of imitation. It will hardly happen again that a writer of equal power will take quite so seriously the society in which he happens to be placed, or watch so lovingly its ways of habit. He will not see the same finality in its frightened compromises, its blunt and capricious ethics, its constant illogicalness. He will be less satisfied with the huge artificial fabric, with which men each century afresh pay tribute for security. The imagination of the new world will spread itself in two directions: in one, and it is perhaps the path which the best will

choose, in a ceaseless didactic effort to bring social ordinances and feeling more in consonance with a morality ampler than rules express; in the other, in an effort to escape. The artist with the instinct of his art strong in him, will not come down, as Miss Austen came down, to meet his time, where certain lines of conduct evoke an equally stereotyped approval or blame. He will hope, either by removing his scene to a past civilization, or by dealing only with those actions, passions, and dispositions which have no limit of place, to appeal to a judgment that is not conventional. He will escape from what is thought or said, to speak of what is, and because he does so his appeal will be lasting. For just as the Hindoo and the Italian are both impressed by the easy triumphs of Nature, and watch with equal wonder the growth of the leaf, or the myriad suns that peep through "the blanket of the dark," so the sorrows of Dido touch the heart of a Mormon, and the utilitarian who accepts Plato's dogma concerning poetry takes a pleasure, in spite of himself, in Shakespeare's noble lies.

THE END

RICHARD CLAY & SONS, LIMITED,
LONDON & BIRMINGHAM.

THACKERAY: a Study. By ADOLPHUS ALFRED JACK.

Crown 8vo. 3s. 6d.

Review of Reviews—"Always bright and interesting."

Cambridge Review—"We have read this volume with considerable interest and pleasure. It is full of good things."

Scotsman—"Will be read with interest by many."

Glasgow Herald—"Mr. Jack may be congratulated on this sound and sensible contribution to the literature of criticism."

St. James's Gazette—"A piece of careful, appreciative, and interesting work."

BY F. MARION CRAWFORD.

THE NOVEL: What it is. Portrait as Frontispiece.

Pott 8vo. 3s.

Scotsman—"Every one who knows Mr. Crawford's work in fiction will read the book with a keen interest, and it may well appeal to a wider circle."

Glasgow Herald—"Full of admirable passages as to the history, character, and destiny of the novel as a literary instrument and an incidental moral force."

Leeds Mercury—"Deserves to be widely read in thoughtful circles. In brief compass, and with a felicity of thought as well as of phrase which is noteworthy, the nature, mission, scope, and characteristics of the novel as a force in present-day society are admirably discussed."

MACMILLAN AND CO., LTD., LONDON.

BY RUDYARD KIPLING.

SOLDIER TALES. Containing "With the Main Guard," "The Drums of the Fore and Aft," "The Man who was," "Courting of Dinah Shadd," "Incarnation of Krishna Mulvaney," "Taking of Lungtungpen," "The Madness of Private Ortheris." With Head and Tail Pieces, and Twenty-one Page Illustrations by A. S. HARTRICK. Crown 8vo, Cloth gilt. Uniform with *Jungle Book*. 6s.

Daily News—"Mr. Kipling's stories of Mulvaney and Co. are as captivating at the tenth reading as at the first—as all stories of first-rate genius are."

THE SECOND JUNGLE BOOK. With Illustrations by J. LOCKWOOD KIPLING. Twenty-second Thousand.

Daily Telegraph—"The appearance of *The Second Jungle Book* is a literary event of which no one will mistake the importance. Unlike most sequels, the various stories comprised in the new volume are at least equal to their predecessors."

THE JUNGLE BOOK. With Illustrations by J. L. KIPLING, W. H. DRAKE, and P. FRENZENY. Thirtieth Thousand. Crown 8vo. 6s.

Athenæum—"We tender our sincere thanks to Mr. Kipling for the hour of pure and unadulterated enjoyment which he has given us, and many another reader, by this inimitable *Jungle Book*."

Punch—"Æsop's Fables and dear old Brer Fox and Co.,' observes the Baron sagely, 'may have suggested to the fanciful genius of Rudyard Kipling the delightful idea, carried out in the most fascinating style, of *The Jungle Book*.'"

WEE WILLIE WINKIE and other Stories. Crown 8vo. 6s.

SOLDIERS THREE and other Stories. Crown 8vo. 6s.

St. James's Gazette—"In these, as the faithful are aware, is contained some of Mr. Kipling's very finest work."

Globe—"Containing some of the best of his highly vivid work."

PLAIN TALES FROM THE HILLS. Thirty-first Thousand.

Crown 8vo. 6s.

Saturday Review—"Mr. Kipling knows and appreciates the English in India, and is a born story-teller and a man of humour into the bargain. . . . It would be hard to find better reading."

Glasgow Herald—"Character, situation, incident, humour, pathos, tragic force, are all in abundance; words alone are at a minimum. Of course these are 'plain' tales—lightning-flash tales. A gleam, and there the whole tragedy or comedy is before you—elaborate it for yourself afterwards."

THE LIGHT THAT FAILED. Rewritten and considerably enlarged. Twentieth Thousand. Crown 8vo. 6s.

Academy—"Whatever else be true of Mr. Kipling, it is the first truth about him that he has power, real intrinsic power. . . . Mr. Kipling's work has innumerable good qualities."

Manchester Courier—"The story is a brilliant one and full of vivid interest."

LIFE'S HANDICAP. Being Stories of Mine Own People. Twenty-third Thousand. Crown 8vo. 6s.

Black and White—"Life's Handicap contains much of the best work hitherto accomplished by the author, and, taken as a whole, is a complete advance upon its predecessors."

Observer—"The stories are as good as ever, and are quite as well told. . . . *Life's Handicap* is a volume that can be read with pleasure and interest under almost any circumstances."

MANY INVENTIONS. Twentieth Thousand. Crown 8vo. 6s.

Pall Mall Gazette—"The completest book that Mr. Kipling has yet given us in workmanship, the weightiest and most humane in breadth of view. . . . It can only be regarded as a fresh landmark in the progression of his genius."

National Observer—"The book is one for all Mr. Kipling's admirers to rejoice in—some for this, and some for that, and not a few for well-nigh everything it contains."

MACMILLAN AND CO., LTD., LONDON.



BINDING SECT. JUL 2 4 1967

PR
5341
J3



Jack, Adolphus Alfred
Essays on the novel as
illustrated by Scott and
Miss Austen

PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE
CARDS OR SLIPS FROM THIS POCKET

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LIBRARY



